

EXCITING SCIENCE FICTION

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STORIES



ONE MAN TO KILL By Paul W. Fairman

THRILLING NEW STORIES OF TOMORROW'S WORLDS!

By C. H. THAMES • IVAR JORGENSEN • MILTON LESSER • and others

to quote:

MILTON LESSER

The old editorial request—flattering but difficult because you'd rather write about other things—for some biographical material has hit me often enough so I know I'd better get in the statistical data before I'm sidetracked.

I was born in Brooklyn the year before they pulled the rug out from under the stock market, so I spent my early childhood in a depression and my later childhood in the biggest war to date. Since then I've been trying to live high off the hog like most of a hundred and sixty or so million other people.

There were four years out for college (William and Mary) and two years out for war (the Korean War, in which I rose to the not-too-exalted rank of corporal, U.S. Army). There was a succession of jobs running the gamut from bartender to semi-pro gambler. There is a wife (Leigh) and two young daughters (Deirdre and Robin). There is a house in suburban Syosset, Long Island and projected trips to far places, most of which haven't materialized at this writing. And there was, is, and will be a lot of writing.

I don't write science-fiction exclusively: I don't think anyone can do that and still turn out his best



work. But science-fiction affords the necessary change-of-pace that a much loved hobby gives anyone and science-fiction always has been my first love in writing. Some of you real old-timers may remember I came up as a fan, via letter columns, conventions and fanzines. I think this is something bound to help in my writing since science-fiction nourishes itself mostly from within. It's something which keeps science-fiction going, too, because a lot of the best loved names in the field came up that way.

I think s-f readers and writers are essentially optimists despite a few crack-of-doom stories. Mankind has a great future, all right—if we can survive the present!

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STORIES

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the observatory

by The Editor



● The author came in shortly before noon. He tried to slam the door but the pneumatic gadget balked any such attempt at self-expression. He swung a chair next to the editor's desk, plopped into it, scowled darkly and said, "Well, when do *you* climb on the bandwagon?"

The editor pushed away the manuscript he was working on and sighed. "Okay. *What* bandwagon?"

"The one most of your competitors are riding. Or don't you read the editorials in other s-f magazines?"

The editor shrugged. "Sure. Some of them anyway."

"Then you know what I'm talking about. Lately they've been sounding off about how the writers are a bunch of lazy, no-talent hacks who've forgotten how to turn out a story."

"Now why," the editor said, "would editors say a thing like that?"

"Okay," the writer said, "I'll tell you why. Because s-f magazines aren't selling like they used to and the editors need somebody to blame it on. Not themselves, of course. God forbid! Who ever heard of an editor making mistakes? They can't pick on the printer or the distributor or the artists. That leaves the writer. So—it's the writer's fault!"

The editor said, "Only you don't think it's the writer's fault at all. Is that it?"

"You're damned right I don't. The writers the editors are blaming bad sales on are the same writers who did the stories when sales were good. No writer tries deliberately to write a bad story. It may turn out that way—nobody's perfect—so let the editor bounce the yarn and he'll get no squawk from the guy who wrote it. But no—now the editors go crying to

the *readers*: 'Sorry our stories stink pal, but we can't help it. You see, the writers are a bunch of incompetents.' If that's being an editor, I'll take vanilla!"

"I see," the editor said. "Then you're saying the stories in s-f magazines these days are mostly good?"

"Depends on what you mean by good," the writer growled. "If you mean are they competently done within the limitations set forth, I'd say yes. But today's s-f suffers from hardening of the editors. Each editor is saying every story he runs must contain certain ingredients. So the writer puts in those ingredients. He'd be crazy not to. Consequently, all the stories in his magazine read alike. No surprises, nothing unexpected, no feeling of freshness and excitement. The reader begins to get bored. He stops buying the magazine. The editor sees the sales figures and screams, 'The writers are ruining me!' Nuts! The writers have nothing to do with it. An editor worthy of the name would try to change what goes into his magazine. He'd come up with new ideas, try new stunts, look for a different approach. He wouldn't just sit around on his big fat cushion and moan about being at the mercy of a bunch of inept word-merchants. The office boy could do *that* for him—and probably do it a lot better!"

"Tell me more," the editor said.

"I'll tell you this much," the author said. "Unless some of these so-called editors wake up goddam soon and do a little *elastic* editing, s-f magazines will become as rare as hip-boots on a ballet dancer. I say the blue-pencil boys are steering straight for the cemetery—and at the same time trying to indict the writers for murder! You think any editor would at least call in his regular contributors and say, 'Look guys, things aren't going too well. Maybe it's my fault. Maybe my ideas are wrong. Let's kind of talk it over and see if we can't come up with something to lure the readers back into the fold.' No, sir! No editor would do it. And why not? Because not one of them has the guts to admit he's considerably less than a genius!"

There was some silence. Finally, the author stood up, said, "See you again sometime," and walked out. This time he didn't try to slam the door.

The editor stirred uncomfortably. "I wonder," he muttered, "if he meant me?"—HB

ONE MAN TO KILL

By PAUL W. FAIRMAN

None of Earth's most advanced weapons was able to penetrate the invaders' defenses. Death for all humanity seemed only a matter of hours . . . until one victim remembered mankind's best assets: human ingenuity!

AT FIRST they thought the Russians had put up an artificial satellite built ahead of us and that it was out there in space, circling the earth, getting ready to smash us.

They woke the President up to tell him. They went to the White House and he received them in his study, a robe on over his pajamas. He said, "All right. Let's have it."

The Secretary of Peace acted as spokesman. As he listened, the President maintained his famous aplomb, keeping his attention on a little brass elephant on his desk. He picked the elephant up, regarded the contour of





Still juggling the shoes, he took a cautious step forward.

its trunk and said, "No hostile gestures so far?"

"None whatever, Mr. President."

The President looked sharply from the elephant to the grim-faced head of CIA. "Does this take you by surprise?"

"Completely."

"No breath of information from behind the Curtain that they were progressing along this line?"

"None whatever."

"Isn't that a little incredible?"

"Yes—and no."

"Please clarify."

"If the satellite is actually of Russian origin—yes. If not—" The Secretary shrugged.

"You've got a point." He turned to the Chief of the Air Arm. "On the basis of what you know at this moment—how well are we equipped to repel the thing?"

The Air Arm Chief, a balding, tired-faced man, said, "I can't answer intelligently because I haven't enough data. They're too far out to touch now, that's definite. If they come in, success or failure of a defense would hinge on two factors."

"And they are—?"

"Origin, first. We've got quite a little stuff to throw at

them, with the rocket classification probably leading the list for effectiveness. Suzy Three goes where she's pointed and could knock a Moscow ship completely out of the sky. So if the satellite is of terrestrial origination I think we could kill it because we're sure their defenses aren't effective against Suzy. But if the things from—from somewhere else, I'm in the dark. We would have no way of knowing the defenses we'd have to penetrate."

"The other factor?"

"Distance. If the satellite can attack effectively from—say where it is now, a hit on our part would be accidental." The general rubbed his chin and added, "Not that we wouldn't try."

There was intense thought all around on this; a long pause before the President said, "Describe it to me again."

The Secretary of Peace took over. "It is tubular—an immense structure, roughly half a mile in diameter and two miles long. It's flat at one end and coned at the other, like a big artillery shell. The power seems to come from the flat end, but we can't be sure because there is no visible exhaust."

The President smiled, "Well, it hasn't changed any since you described it before." He turned to the Secretary of the Interior who was his closest friend in the group. "Any observations?"

"Two questions."

"What are they?"

"Are we going to take a shot at the thing?"

The President glanced at the Attorney General. "What's the legal aspect?"

"It would depend on the satellite's position when we fired. We control the air over the nation clear to infinity."

The President smiled grimly. "Do we indeed?"

"That is of course, legally."

"A comforting thought, but I'm afraid we'll have to await action on their part before we start pulling triggers. What was your other question?"

The Interior Secretary said, "What are we going to tell the people?"

"We'll establish strict censorship, of course," the Secretary of the Navy said.

The President looked at him sharply. When he spoke, his voice was tart. "I think I'll assign that chore to you. Order all the scientists in the observatories to stop looking through their telescopes. Arrest all amateur astronomers and toss them in the Potomac.

Issue an order that no one venture into the street unless securely blindfolded."

The Navy Secretary reddened. "I was only thinking of—"

"Perhaps there's been a little too much of that kind of thinking." He turned to his press secretary who was standing behind his chair and slightly to the right. "Prepare a simple, concise statement. Incorporate everything we know—which in reality is nothing—and let me see it before it's released."

There was a long silence which the President finally broke. He said, "Gentlemen, I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm scared."

The Secretary of Peace, who was given to bombast, got up from his chair and scowled in his best television manner. He said, "Mr. President, I say to you that not a single missile from this invader will ever defile the soil of our nation."

The President said, wearily, "Oh, sit down! The election's a long ways away."

The press secretary went out to prepare a statement for the public . . .

The Secretary of Peace was completely wrong in his prediction. Even before the White

House statement had been prepared, the satellite attacked. Its actions seemed peculiar but later the military strategists interpreted them thus:

The invader, unfamiliar with our means of defense, but evidently confident of their comparative strength, moved down until they came within range, thereby inviting attack. We obliged with everything we had. Everything was not enough. They were cored in the center of some sort of force-field that rendered our missiles ineffective. Even Suzy Three veered around the objective and found herself an eternal orbit in space.

After determining to their satisfaction that they had weathered our best, they circled the globe and then came back to hover close over Seattle, Washington. They had demonstrated their invulnerability and now proceeded to show us what they could do on the offensive. This was swift, terrible, and annihilating. From a point some two miles above the center of the city, they blew it off the face of the nation with a weapon beyond our understanding. It was in the nature of a power spray that umbrellaed down and devastated a circle with

a diameter of around twenty-five miles. There were no great explosions, but the buildings and all else within the perimeter was ground to rubble as from the pressure of a giant hand. Practically all life was exterminated, but it was learned from a very few chance survivors on the outskirts that the death dealt out had been excruciatingly painful. The survivors had seen people writhing in the streets, screaming, tearing off their clothing in maddened panic to die naked with whimperings on their lips. One observer said it was as though they had been stung to death.

After smashing Seattle the ship cruised lazily across the country, evidently on reconnaissance, taking everything our defense could throw at it—taking the attacks in seeming contempt.

It centered its next attentions upon New York City, possibly after deciding this was the greatest population area. It smashed at the city, but not with the fury of the Seattle attack. The hand was somewhat more gentle in that all was not reduced to rubble. The stinging death was used effectively, but evacuation had practically emptied Manhattan Island and surrounding environs; not completely,

however, and most of those who remained behind died miserably. Some, however, did not.

After this second attack, the alien ship hung motionless over the scene as though contemplating the vast destruction, the explosions, the fires, the huge clouds of smoke billowing miles into the sky. It stood up there for a long time, until the smoke settled and the ruins stood sharp and clear. Then it moved down for a landing. It settled in the East River, offshore of Manhattan Island and near Riker's Island.

Soon another demonstration of their power was made. When the waters around the base of the craft stiffened into ice which expanded into a wide circle and provided a platform upon which some of the ship's occupants could be seen.

But the majority of them used entrances and exits high in the tube of the ship, transported by peculiar units that looked like pogo sticks and were propelled by whirling discs of some sort.

The Air Force moved experimentally against a sortie of these birdmen but got nowhere. The individual invaders stayed within the covering

arm of the ship's protective aura.

As the Secretary of Peace said to the Secretary of the Interior in a Washington bomb shelter: things looked bad . . .

Tony Marko missed death in the Manhattan attack by mere chance. A naturalist by inclination and inquisitive by instinct, he was exploring a subceller when the blow was struck. He stayed where he was and listened to the thunder of destruction until it subsided. Then he went upstairs to find the balance of his group either dead or screaming out their last moments in terrible agony. The last one died in his arms and so long as there was nothing more he could do, he got away from that horrible death's nest.

But there was no place to go except from one ruin to another. He sought cover where he could and moved in the direction of the piers facing the East River. They weren't far away and he was soon crouched in a ruined building looking out at the great ship.

He'd been there only a few moments when he heard the scream. Someone was obviously running toward the ruin but from an angle beyond

range of his vision. The screaming continued and he knew the poor unfortunate had entered the ruins in which he lay hidden and was somewhere to his left. He moved in that direction, guided by the pitiful pleas for help, yet sure the while that he could do nothing.

It was an auburn-haired girl who had evidently spent a lot of time under a sun lamp or on a beach because she was deeply tanned with the two strips of white around her body where convention demanded clothing. She wore no clothing now. She had come to this place because she could run no further. But there was still strength left in her body. She had used it in an agonized, unreasoning effort toward relief by tearing off her clothing. She had just finished when Tony entered.

He doubted she even saw him, so great was her shock. She paused for a moment like a stricken animal and then started back toward the open street.

Tony got his hands on her just in time and pulled her back into the shelter. He held her there hopelessly, unable to help her, but wanting desperately to do something. "Take it easy, Miss. There's no good going out there again.

You're better off here. Is there anything I can do?"

She stared at him sightlessly for a moment, apparently not understanding his words. Then she began fighting with a strength born of pain and hopelessness.

Finally, Tony could stand the sight of her agony no longer. He released her and set himself and as she turned to flee, his right fist stopped her dead. It was a good punch connecting squarely with the point of the chin and the girl went down in a heap.

Tony knelt and shaped her clothing into a pillow and put them under her head. "You poor kid," he muttered. "You poor kid. If there was only some way I could help."

There appeared to be no way. Grim-faced, he studied the flesh of her body, seeking some visible sign of the attack.

It was there, hundreds of tiny red swellings as though the girl had encountered a swarm of deadly insects. Tony laid his hand on her body and even in her unconsciousness, she cringed and a small sob escaped her lips.

Then he remembered something . . .

The President sat in his underground office in Washing-

ton, D. C. He appeared to have aged ten years. The Secretary of Peace sat across from him and beside the Chief of the Air Arm. The President said, "I don't suppose you bring me any good news."

"I'm afraid not, Mr. President," the Secretary of Peace said.

The President sighed. He lifted a sheaf of papers from his desk. "I have some that might be classed as good, though at moment it strikes me as ironic."

"We'd like to hear it."

"These messages. Promises of wholehearted cooperation from practically every nation on earth. It seems that now when it's too late, the cold war is over. Russia offers us the use of her entire atomic arsenal—come and take what we want or the Kremlin will deliver them on the west coast together with their crack troops and scientists."

"They're scared."

"You bet your life they are—along with everybody else. England—the Commonwealth—even the Swiss—have put themselves under our command. Red China offers us all the manpower we can transport, together with any guarantee we demand of their sincere intent."

"If those notes had come

ten years ago, we might find ourselves in a stronger position today. Noncooperation of the past could well be our destruction now."

"What's the latest from New York? Any sign of the ship moving on to destroy other cities?"

"None that we can see."

"Exactly what is the core of our helplessness?"

"Our inability to get at them. We know something about the shield they use. We believe it's a sonic device keyed against steel and possibly aluminum. That means nothing with a content of these metals can get through at projectile speeds. Slower speeds, yes, but destructive missiles are not effective except at high velocity."

"Could a hydrogen bomb be floated down upon their craft?"

"So far as the shield is concerned, it could, but their ship has a fire power almost beyond conception. It supplements the shield. They are able to detonate our missiles at safe distances. This, we've discovered."

"How about an armored column moving across the ice they formed around the ship?"

"It would be useless slaughter."

"Then there is no answer?"

"Time is our only weapon. Time for research. They are ahead of us, but we are working night and day."

"How much time?"

"I don't know."

"Enough for them to devastate our cities one by one at their leisure?"

"I'm afraid I can't say, Mr. President."

"Perhaps Russia has something."

The Secretary of Peace shook his head. "We know pretty much what Russia has. I'm afraid we would draw a blank in that direction."

"Nevertheless, we must do two things."

"Two things?"

"Consult with Russia."

"And the other?"

"The most important—pray."

"Are you feeling better now?" Tony Marko smiled and spoke gently as the girl opened her eyes.

She looked around slowly and her mouth was set to scream. Then she lost some of her tension as she discovered a scream was not necessary. "It—it doesn't hurt so much."

"I'm glad."

Her eyes ran slowly down her own body; then her hands

explored feebly. "What's this—this stuff on me?"

"Grease and motor oil. I remembered a demolished garage back along the street and ran up there and found some cans that hadn't been destroyed."

"You rubbed it on me?"

"Yes. I didn't know whether it would do any good or not but I had to do something."

She rubbed at some of the thick grease, investigating. "You took my clothes off?"

"You don't remember tearing them off yourself?"

She was suspicious and frightened. "Why would I do that?"

"You were in great pain. You probably don't recall anything you did."

"I—I remember the pain—the agony. I wanted to die."

"I think maybe you were struck lightly with whatever the hellish ray is that they use. Do you remember?"

"Yes. I guess I was foolish, but instead of running, I stopped to look. Then I got scared and ran into a building."

"How did you happen to be here at all? Everyone was supposed to leave."

"I was looking for a friend—a girl I lived with. She was—is—a model too and she went on an assignment and I

couldn't get in touch with her. I stayed around waiting for her. I stayed too long."

"You were very loyal. She probably got out safely."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was a member of a Civil Defense squad. We were combing the buildings for stragglers and got caught in the blast. I was the only survivor."

She looked at him without fear now, as though they were partners in distress—which indeed they were. "It must have been awful!"

"No use dwelling on that. My name is Tony Marko. You didn't tell me yours."

"Candy Thompson."

"A nice name."

"It's—well, it's not my real name. It's one I use at the agencies. My real name is Audrey."

"You must like Candy better, so that's the one I'll use. How do you feel?"

She ran timid hands over her body. "The burning isn't nearly as bad. Do you think the grease healed it?"

"I don't know. Probably not. You must have been hit lightly and it would no doubt have worn away by itself."

"The only thing is, I'm weak—weak as a cat."

"I suppose that's natural. Maybe we'd better take the

grease off and get your clothes back on you."

Some of the fear came back into her face. "I'd rather just lie here and rest. I'm afraid I haven't got the strength to clean this off and—"

"Candy, there's something you've got to understand and get used to."

She was still fearful. "Yes?"

"We've got to try and survive. All useless things like modesty have to go. All the conventions and the niceties will have to wait for normal times. Right now the important thing is to get you ready to move out of here and if you can't do it yourself, I'll have to help you."

"But we've got no soap, no—"

"There were several cans of mechanic's soap back there. And there's plenty of water from broken mains. You wait here. Just lie quiet and rest until I get back."

On the way to the garage, he wondered if she would wait. Perhaps her modesty would drive her away. But where? Out into the street, naked?

When he got back, she hadn't moved. He said, "I brought a bucket and a can of kerosene. We'll cut the

worst of the grease away with kerosene and then use the soap. Wait until I get some water."

He filled a bucket from a pool in the basement and knelt beside her. She lay quietly, her eyes closed, while he used the kerosene to cut off the heavy grease. "This may burn," he said. "It's not recommended for tender skin." He saw the blush on her cheeks and felt sorry for her and said, "Please don't feel that way. Just remember that before we're out of this, you may be doing even more for me."

She opened her eyes. "Do you think we'll ever get out?"

"We're still alive," he said, trying to make his voice sound cheerful.

"Yes, we are, aren't we?" Candy raised herself up from the floor. "I feel better now. Maybe I can help." She managed a smile and said, "I—I feel awfully vulnerable without any clothes on."

"That's better," Tony said briskly, and they went to work. And after a while, he got to his feet, saying, "I guess you can finish up with the rest of it."

As he turned away, Candy said, "Thanks—thanks a lot," and there was a huskiness in her voice.

Tony walked to the window. He took a pipe from his pocket and lit it and stood looking out over the East River.

Soon, Candy was beside him, touching his arm. She said, "You were hurt yourself. That bandage around your head."

"It was nothing. A scalp wound. I bandaged it to stop the bleeding."

"I—I haven't thanked you yet."

He ignored her words and pointed out the ruined window with the stem of his pipe. "Well, there it is. The ship that's terrorized the entire world."

They stared in silence; a great shining cylinder in a huge circle of ice. There was activity around its base and as they watched, a line of foragers winged out from a port high in the tower of the ship and arced off across Manhattan.

"Do they remind you of anything?" Tony said.

Candy shuddered. "Of barbarians — killers — murderers."

"No, they aren't barbarians. Their science is far more advanced than ours."

She turned her eyes on him; looked at him closely. "I envy

you for being able to take it so calmly."

He shrugged. "Everything is comparative and people are more inclined to panic in anticipation than after the fact. Come devastation, hell, or slaughter, when the smoke dies down, the people go on living—what's left of them—because that's all there is to do."

"Philosophy isn't much comfort at a time like—"

"After the smoke dies down."

She looked at him quickly and found his eyes abstract even though they still looked out at the ship. "What did you say?"

"I was just thinking. There is something damned peculiar about those people. Something I can't put my finger on. See them coming out of that port up there? The way they move on those pogo sticks. Doesn't it remind you of something?"

"Nothing I can think of. You asked that before."

"They stayed in their ship until all the smoke was gone. I wonder—"

Candy seized his arm and they looked up the street toward a new sound. They watched in silence as a group of refugees came into view. They were being herded along

by a half dozen of the invaders.

Tony had not seen the spacemen at such close range before. He studied them. They wore no helmets and had a facial structure he tried to define and couldn't. They could have passed for earthlings and yet not, because—while being physically acceptable—they belonged in none of the racial groups of Earth. They wore green uniforms and impressed Tony as being of rather fragile structure.

The refugees were both male and female, perhaps a dozen in all, and Tony noticed the impersonal attitude with which the invaders regarded them. *As though they were driving cattle*, he thought.

"They haven't got any weapons," he said.

Candy paid no attention. She pulled at his arm. "Let's get away from here while we can! It's foolhardy to—"

"They carry no weapons and yet our people are afraid of them."

"They must be armed in some manner."

"The bunch they've captured know something about them we don't. Otherwise they would resist."

"Tony! We've got to go!"

"All right, but there's something damned peculiar—" He

did not finish. He felt Candy's nails digging into his arm and turned and saw the man who had entered the demolished room.

He was huge and hostile and drunk. He had a week's growth of dirty beard on his face and a half empty whiskey bottle in his hand. Tony classified him instantly. The backwash of any disaster. The looter, the skulking killer who drew his courage from chaos and the breakdown of law and order.

The man was leering at Candy through small, blood-shot eyes. "Hullo, baby. Let's you and me have fun, huh?"

Tony moved forward. "Be quiet, you fool. They're out there in the street. They're after us."

The man grinned. "Them jerks? Ain't given me no trouble so far." He returned his eyes to Candy. "You better duck this bum, honey and string along with me. I'll keep you out of trouble."

He lurched forward, grinning and extending the bottle. Tony moved in between and threw a punch at the man's jaw. It was a good punch, perfectly timed and with everything behind it that Tony had. All it accomplished was to knock the grin off the man's

face and replace it with a snarl.

He moved with an amazing speed for a drunk, coming forward and snatching a knife from his pocket in a single motion.

"Tony!" Candy cried. "Look out!" She leaped in from the man's unprotected side and seized his arm. He growled and threw her off without taking his eyes from Tony. "I'm gonna carve me a little meat," he growled.

Tony's rage sprang mainly from the stupidity of this brute. Starting a fight when their very existence was in doubt. "For Heaven's sake! Quiet down 'til they get by. Then we'll settle our differences."

"We'll settle 'em now!" The man lunged forward and brought the knife around in a vicious, practiced arc. He was aiming for the belly, but Tony twisted aside and felt a sharp pain in his thigh.

He went down, blood spurt-ing from his wound, and saw the man's whiskered face hanging above him. He rolled desperately to the left as the man's knee came down toward his exposed groin. The knee missed and the man grunted from sharp contact with the ground.

The man got to his feet and

grinned down at Tony. With a slow, deliberate gesture, he pocketed the knife. Then he smashed the bottle against the wall. The whiskey splashed out and he was holding a weapon of jagged glass. He muttered, "So long, sucker!" and took a step toward Tony.

Then several things happened quickly. Candy screamed and pressed herself against the wall. The whiskered man stiffened. An odd expression covered his face. He took a stiff step backward and dropped the bottle and Tony saw the two invaders standing by the shattered rear wall.

Their manner was casual, almost negligent. One of them moved toward the whiskered man with a strange mincing step that Tony had noticed previously. He patted the man's torso with slim, fragile hands, his purpose obvious. He was checking the man over as would a prospective buyer in an ancient slave mart.

The other invader moved on Candy in the same manner and duplicated the inspection. She crouched stiffly against the wall, her lower lip gripped tightly in white teeth.

Then the first one turned his attention to Tony. He knelt down and examined the

thigh wound, got to his feet and considered Tony thoughtfully as though making a decision. He turned to his companion and emitted an odd, whining sound. The other looked at Tony and answered in kind. Whereupon the first one reached down and lifted Candy's skirt and tried to rip it.

He did not have enough strength in his hands and he pointed first at Tony's thigh and then jerked at the skirt roughly.

Candy understood. She bent over and tore a strip off the bottom of the skirt and knelt down beside Tony. The two invaders conversed in the whining language as she banded the wound. Candy bent close and whispered, "What will they do with us?"

His eyes upon them, Tony spoke aloud. "I think they're gathering up slaves and evidently we qualify. They'll probably take us directly to the ship."

"Then we're finished."

"It seems so."

Tony was watching the two closely for reaction to his words. There was none. Evidently they got nothing from his statements. But he could not be sure and he had to know. He said, "They're a couple of cowardly, degener-

ate slob without a brain cell working."

The pair conversed casually in their own tongue. Tony was satisfied. He could speak freely, although he could not see where it helped much.

The wound dressed, Tony was motioned to his feet and the three of them were herded out to join the group in the street. It was made up of hopeless, beaten people but all in good physical shape. There were seven females and nine males in various stages of undress. One distinguished, gray-haired man wore a pair of trousers and nothing else. He stood defiantly erect and as he caught Tony's eye, his lips quirked humorously. "Grabbed them the last moment," he said. "Otherwise I'd have been as naked as a jay bird. As bad off as that girl, poor thing."

He gestured at a dark-haired girl with stunned eyes and an empty face who was trying to cover herself with a scrap of cloth no bigger than a handkerchief.

Tony felt Candy's hand withdrawn from his own. He turned as she was removing her blouse. He said, "Wait a minute. I've got less to expose above the waist than you have." He stripped off his shirt and handed it to Candy.

Candy approached the dark girl and touched her shoulder. The girl started, then cringed, but allowed Candy to slip her arms into the shirt and fasten it down the front.

"She looks cute as button now, doesn't she?" the gray-haired man said in a light-hearted way.

Tony liked him. He was maintaining a front against this terror. He refused to cower. Tony said, "It looks as though we're going to be commissioned to wait on these characters."

"I wouldn't be surprised," the man said. "By the way, my name is Davis."

"I'm Marko. Why didn't you evacuate with the rest?"

"I didn't believe all this. Had work to do. Hid in the washroom of my office. Now the washroom's gone. So is the office. Building, too. Joke's on me, what?"

"Joke's on all of us, I guess."

Candy returned from comforting the dark girl and Tony introduced her.

Davis said, "When all this unpleasantness is over, you must come and see me, my dear. I'll make a model out of you. I run an agency."

Candy gave him an amused look. "I am a model. I spent a

whole day last week trying to get into your private office."

"Fancy that. When you come the next time, you'll find the door open."

Tony asked, "What's your reaction to these creatures?"

"My reaction would be censored. I suppose we're heading for that oversized cigar in the East River."

"And there'll be no transportation problem."

"How do you suppose they do that freezing trick? Solid ice clear to the shore."

As they moved out onto the frozen East River, a flight of the invaders appeared from the north and circled the ship until a port was opened high in the nose where they entered one by one, each bearing a container of some sort.

"What do they remind you of?" Tony asked.

"I don't quite know," Davis replied. "A flight of geese perhaps. But I imagine one would have difficulty bringing them down with a shotgun. The army couldn't even do it with jets."

"They remind me of something entirely different," Tony said. There was a thoughtful look in his eyes as he watched the last flier enter the ship.

"Amazing how they get around on those absurd sticks," Davis said.

Tony had recaptured Candy's hand. Now she jerked it away and said, "If you two don't quit talking like an afternoon on the golf course, I'll—I'll scream. You sound as though—"

"As though we'd conquered *them*, my dear?" Davis asked gently. "Dignity in defeat is all we have left. Let us cherish it."

At that moment, the column was halted and two aliens approached from another point on the shore with three new captives. The six guards came together and had a birdlike conference relative to the newcomers. They were three men, Bowery types, one very old. As they came close, the two younger ones were herded into the column. The old man was driven to the left where he stood by himself, shuffling uncertain feet on the East River ice.

Then Tony saw one of the aliens stiffen and crouch as though to spring. An instant later the old man threw up his arms, screamed shrilly, and fell into a writhing heap. Within thirty seconds the writhing had stopped, the screaming had ended.

"He's dead!" Candy gasped.

"Evidently he didn't measure up to the physical requirement for slaves," Davis said.

"But how was he killed?" Tony asked.

Davis shrugged. "Some sort of power they have. Now we can understand why they don't carry weapons."

The column was gestured into movement and the trek continued. As they approached the ship, Candy leaned close to Tony and whispered. "That hoodlum who knifed you back in the ruin. He's been glaring at you all the way out. You must be careful."

"I don't think there's anything to worry about from that direction. They'll probably take his knife when we get to the ship. I wish he was our biggest problem."

There was one more stop before entering the ship. The captives were lined up and two of the invaders went down the line going swiftly through those who still had clothing on. "He'll lose his knife now," Candy said. But this was not true. The invaders were after something entirely different — cigarettes, pipes, tobacco, matches. These they took from the captives and threw across the ice away from the ship.

Tony leaned close to Davis. "Now what do you make of that?"

"I haven't got the least idea.

Perhaps the interior of the ship is highly inflammable."

"Hardly seems likely. Must be some other reason."

Candy's face was white and drawn. "I can't understand you two. Aren't you the least bit frightened? Haven't you any emotions at all?"

Tony took her hand but kept his eyes straight ahead. "If you want the truth, I'm scared stiff . . ."

The President of the United States was speaking. From the top to the bottom of the world, people listened. Whenever a video or a radio set functioned, there was strict attention.

The President said, "This will be the greatest mass action the world has ever known. In one respect, it will be mankind's greatest forward step in mutual cooperation and for this, I am grateful. In a joint action, the magnitude of which has never before been conceived, bombers, rocket carriers, and engines of destruction that stagger the imagination will be thrown against the invaders who hold a beachhead on our coast. The gravity of the situation is such that extreme measures must be taken if this nation or this world is to survive. The price will be great—com-

plete devastation of our greatest city and all else within a radius of five hundred miles. The decision to make this move was arrived at only after days of soul-searching and prayer. I feel the decision is right; that this course is the only one open to us; that these invaders must be blown from the face of our earth at whatever the cost. We will not fail . . ."

The captives were driven like cattle into the ship, down a long corridor and into a room walled completely in some shining metal.

"Aluminum?" Davis asked.

Tony said, "I don't think so. Some kind of an alloy."

"I'd give a lot to know their source of power."

"I'd give a lot to know quite a few things about them, but I doubt if we'll get the chance to find out."

"We're going up," Candy said.

"So we are," Davis replied. "This isn't a room at all, it's an elevator."

After what seemed a long time, one of the walls slid back and they were in a second corridor. As they were herded along they passed quite a number of the aliens going back and forth. Tony was struck by their uniformity of atti-

tude. To him, all of the faces seemed the same, yet he was quite sure they could tell each other apart. They never smiled and never seemed in the grip of any emotion whatever unless it was boredom. "Do you think they consider themselves a super race?" he asked.

"I imagine their alien minds can only be evaluated by their own kind. Their mental processes would probably make no sense to us."

"Do you think so? I wonder if there is really anything alien in the universe?"

"What do you mean by that?"

Tony's eyes were vague. "I don't quite know myself. I'm groping. I've seen some things that may mean everything or nothing. If they're indicative, I can use them for a basis of projection, you might say."

"What things are you talking about?"

"They'd probably sound silly to you."

"I'd like to hear them anyhow."

"I'm wondering why they took away our tobacco and matches."

"Perhaps they thought they were weapons of some description."

"Maybe. And I'm wondering why the ship didn't come

down until the last clouds of smoke and dust were gone."

"It may have been coincidental."

"Right again. Did you see what that flight of foragers brought back to the ship?"

"Not at the distance. My eyes aren't too good."

"They'd raided the warehouses over on the other side of the island. Each one carried a bag of sugar."

"That was probably the reason they didn't flatten the area completely. They needed supplies."

The lead guard was turning the line into a room off the corridor. It appeared little different to Tony from the elevator in which they'd been brought high up into the ship. There was one small exception. On the four sides where the walls and the ceiling met, the shining alloy fused into what was obviously ordinary glass.

He wondered about the purpose of this and he quickly found out when the glass suddenly brightened into electric blue and he recoiled from the mild shock of penetrating rays.

Candy's teeth snapped together as she clutched at Tony. He caught her and she spoke through stiff lips.

"Good God! We're being electrocuted!"

"I don't think so. Just hang on."

After a few minutes, the glow faded and there was only the soft, yellow, shadowless beam from the center of the ceiling.

Candy got her jaws unstuck and said, "I hope they enjoyed that—I didn't."

"What do you suppose it was?" Davis asked.

"I don't know," Tony replied, "but I've got a hunch it was a germ killer of some kind. I'll bet we're all sterilized now—bones, flesh, and rags."

The next stop was the end of the line—at least temporarily; a long, low-ceilinged room equipped with metal tables, benches, and cots. The cots were covered with a very thin pad of soft material and appeared quite uncomfortable.

"Looks like we're home at last," Davis said.

"Guess so." Tony rubbed a hand over his chin and added, "There's another thing I've noticed."

"What's that?"

"No women."

Davis considered. "You're right. All we've seen so far, are men."

"That's what I mean."

"Not strange, though. This is an army. An expeditionary force. It's quite logical they'd have no women aboard."

"Even if they came from outer space?"

Davis dropped wearily onto a cot. "True, but I don't think the absence of women indicates anything one way or the other."

Tony scowled. "That's the damn trouble. Every suspicious thing I see could be important, unimportant, coincidence— Oh hell! I'm tired." He dropped down on the cot next to Davis and threw an arm over his eyes.

Candy sat down beside him and moved the arm away. "Tony, what have you got on your mind? What are you driving at?"

"Nothing, I guess. It would probably sound silly. It probably *is* silly."

"We're in this together. We have a right to know."

"It would be pretty hard to explain."

"You could try."

"Well, it has to do with a half-baked theory of mine concerning dominance of species."

Davis chuckled grimly. "You really are getting in deep, old man."

"Go on, Tony," Candy said.

"To illustrate—*homo sa-*

piens is the dominant species on Earth. Why?"

"Because he's the most able, the most intelligent," Davis said, speaking with his eyes closed.

"Then you'd say his dominance was foreordained?"

"Why—yes, I suppose so."

Tony's eyes wandered up and down the room. The aliens had left and the captives were huddled here and there in various postures of hopelessness. The dark girl was crying softly on a bed directly opposite. Further down, the hoodlum with the knife was sprawled on a cot staring at the ceiling. He appeared to be nursing a gigantic hangover.

Tony said, "But suppose it wasn't foreordained? Let's say it was a matter of merest luck. Let's say that in the dim beginnings, some species of bird or insect got the upper hand and showed a determination to boss the show. What then?"

Davis yawned. "I'd say they couldn't get to first base because their bodies aren't built for domination. Only Man has a thumb."

"But maybe Man got that thumb because he earned it by proving his determination to survive."

"This discussion is a mar-

velous way to pass the time, Marko, and don't think I'm not interested because I keep agreeing with you. It's just that I'm tired out. Now I'm going to go along with you on the surmise that Man's body was a utilitarian gift that evolution handed him because he earned it, not because he had it in the beginning. That brings us to the logical conclusion that any species from lizards to leopards would look the same as we look at this stage of development. Start with a false premise and you arrive at a logical but false conclusion."

"They would look as we do—yes. But basically different instincts would *remain* different, wouldn't they? What I'm driving at is—"

Davis opened his eyes and turned to look at Tony. "Now we're getting to where I'm interested, Marko. Exactly what *are* you driving at?"

Tony dropped back in sudden weariness. "Oh, forget it. Nothing, I guess. Candy—I'm sorry I—" He stopped. Candy was curled up close to him, sound asleep . . .

The President of the United States and his cabinet, the leaders of many nations, a host of dignitaries, sat in a large, subterranean room with

seven huge television monitors on a curved wall in front of them. There was a low hum of muted conversation, but the overall effect was one of almost complete silence.

A quiet, matter-of-fact voice came from a speaker over the monitors: "Zero plus sixty seconds — fifty seconds — forty seconds — thirty — twenty — ten — eight — six — five — four — three — two — zero—"

The monitors flashed into life. There was no sound track but none was needed. The imagination provided all the sound necessary at sight of the manufactured hell that broke loose. The curtain was raised by the mushroom of a hydrogen bomb that exploded on two monitors above the nose of the alien ship that could be seen at the bottom of the screens.

On another pair of monitors, were the images of a rocket-carrier fleet streaking down across the screens. In perfect rhythm, they released a barrage of rockets that flashed down and disappeared into the immense hydrogen bomb cloud.

There was more. Other monitors revealed a line of battle wagons in a vast curve some miles out in the Atlantic. They rocked in unison as

more atomic warheads were hurled into the maelstrom.

Somewhere in the room, a whisper sounded like a roar as someone paraphrased the great Winston Churchill: "Never in the history of the world has so much been thrown at so little in such a short time."

Now, there was nothing to do but wait. They waited, no one begrudging the time. An hour passed. Then a northeast wind swept down the coast, blowing the clouds away, shortening the time of uncertainty.

Finally, the press secretary leaned close. "Any statement, Mr. President?"

"Yes. In the beginning, we had two chances of success; international cooperation, and prayer. Tell them that prayer alone is left."

He spoke as the thinning cloud revealed seven images of the alien ship intact and shining on the ice of the East River . . .

About an hour after their arrival in the prison room, the captives were given bowls of a sweet colorless concoction that they would not have chosen voluntarily but which was not unwelcome under the circumstances. Then the lights were dimmed for what was

obviously intended as a sleep period.

Candy was deep in exhaustion and again went to sleep beside Tony on his narrow cot. But Tony and Davis, however, found sleep more difficult.

"What kind of work do you think we're slated for?" Davis asked.

"It's hard to say. This ship seems so completely automatic, it's hard to imagine any physical labor being necessary."

"Scrub the floors, probably. Kneel to the conquerors. I'm going to try to get some sleep and rest my knees for the ordeal."

After a time, they drifted off to sleep with the rest of the group.

Tony had no way of knowing how much time had past before a high feminine shriek brought him bolt upright. Then, in the dimness, he saw a bloody tragedy he could probably have averted had his brain not been clouded with sleep.

Across the aisle, the cot of the dark girl was already overturned. A roar of bull anger struck Tony's ears and he saw a melee of legs, both male and female, behind the cot. There was another roar of pain and rage that mingled

with the continued screams of the dark girl.

Then the cot fell forward to reveal red horror. The bearded hoodlum had made a mistake. He had picked the wrong girl. She had turned into a screaming wildcat and had somehow got possession of the hoodlum's knife.

She had used it with telling effect. Blood welled from the would-be ravisher at a dozen places. His roars were now turning to squalls of agony.

Then there was silence. He was dead.

Both Tony and Davis sprang forward. The girl fell back against the wall sobbing with hysteria. She threw the bloody knife away from her and smeared blood on her face by putting her hands to her eyes. "He sneaked down here!" she sobbed. "He thought I was asleep! He put his hand over my mouth! He threatened to kill me. He put his hands—"

Candy came forward. "You poor kid! It's all right now. Really it is. He got what he deserved. Stop crying—please. It doesn't help any."

Tony paid no attention to the girl. He had grown suddenly alert, but only Davis noticed it. Tony snatched the knife and whispered, "They'll

probably be here in a minute. Quick—wipe the blood off that knife while I unwind this bandage!"

"What's on your mind?"

"They'll come in here and we can't lose this knife. It's our last chance at survival."

Davis wiped the blade on the slashed mattress. "I wasn't aware that we had any chance at all."

"Perhaps we haven't, but if there is one, we can't take advantage of it without a weapon."

While the others stood gaping at the bloody mess, Tony laid the knife against his thigh and rewound the bandage. As he was finishing, the lights bloomed up. He ran to the dark girl and found that Candy had wiped most of the blood from her shivering body.

Tony said, "Quick! Get her over there on that fresh cot! Stay with her. Both of you act as though you're asleep when they come."

"And all the rest of you," Davis ordered, "back to your cots. And be quiet!"

The door opened and three of the aliens entered the room. They stood just inside the doorway in a compact group poised for action. But the violence had ended. All the captives were stretched on their

cots. One of the men managed to snore convincingly.

The aliens came down the aisle and stood looking at the dead body of the hoodlum. They conversed among themselves in their strange buzzing language and Tony noted that for the first time since his contact with them, they displayed emotion. A kind of dull anger.

One of them pushed the cot away and knelt beside the dead hoodlum. He pulled away the slashed clothing and pointed to the knife cuts on the body. The dark girl had done a hysterically good job and there was little uncut skin left on the man's chest and abdomen.

The aliens surveyed the damage with marked disgust. They conversed together while Tony and Davis lay tensed for trouble.

But the spacemen continued to ignore their captives. After more conversation, one of them left the room while the other two searched half-heartedly around the bed. Then they made an inspection tour up and down the aisle between the cots but seemed loathe to go too close to the prisoners and Tony felt sure this attitude sprang from distaste rather than fear. He likened them in his mind to

packers looking over a pen of hogs.

A few moments later the door opened and the third alien returned pushing a small dolly. The three of them rolled the dead body onto the dolly and hauled it out of the room. The door closed. The lights dimmed. The incident seemed closed.

"What do you think of that demonstration?" Davis asked in a low voice.

"Damned if I know."

"They appeared disgusted at the condition of the body."

"That was my impression. Yet they gave no thought at all to who did the job."

"Strange."

"Perhaps not."

"Why do you say that?"

"Let's look at it this way—if you had a herd of cattle and came out one morning and found a cow gored to death, would you waste time trying to find the animal responsible?"

"No, I guess not."

"I think we're on par with a herd of cattle so far as they're concerned."

"I'm afraid you're right, my friend."

They lay in silence for a while, then Davis sat up on his cot. He said, "There's something I've got to check."

Tony glanced at him in surprise. "What's that?"

"Something I noticed—or at least, I think I did."

Tony waited a while, then said, "Well, why don't you check it?"

"I'm afraid to."

"Why?"

"I'm afraid it's what I think it is."

"You're talking in riddles."

Davis sighed and got to his feet. "Might as well get it over with." He walked to the slashed and bloody bed the dark girl had occupied when the hoodlum attempted to attack her. While Tony lay quiet, waiting, Davis inspected the mattress carefully. He strained the cuts open and looked underneath. Then he stood motionless for a long time before he went back to his cot.

"Well—? Tony asked.

"I was right. I think I know why we were herded in here now."

"Why?"

"Go and look for yourself. Check the underside of the leather on that mattress."

Tony crossed the aisle and duplicated Davis' inspection. Then he came back and lay down on his cot.

"Did you find it?" Davis asked.

"Yes."

"What did it look like to you?"

"Hair."

"Off the chest and abdomen of a man?"

"Right. It was unmistakable. The tanning process they use leaves the hair on the skin intact. They turn it to the inside using the inner surface of the skin as an outer surface."

"My interpretation exactly."

"That opens new avenues of conjecture, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does. I'd say it confirms the cattle theory with a vengeance."

"And knocks out the idea of our being servants—slaves."

"Right. They brought us here because they want our hides. How does it feel to be a prospective mattress?"

"Or the leather seat on one of their chairs."

"Or the surface of a boxing glove—if they do any boxing."

Davis said, "I'm a little sick inside, Marko."

"You and me both."

"We've got to keep this to ourselves."

"Of course."

"And now, let's try and get some sleep. It will help pass the time."

"Okay." There was perhaps five minutes of silence before

Tony said, "Davis—I've got a hunch."

"Yes?"

"I've got a hunch that this whole thing boils down to a very fine point."

"What point?"

"That there's only one man to kill. Or maybe he isn't a man. Maybe she's a woman."

Davis sighed. "I won't ask you to explain. I'm too tired. Too far down."

"I probably couldn't explain if you asked, but I'm wondering about something else."

"What's that?"

Tony came up on his elbow. "Suppose you owned a herd of cattle. Suppose one of the bulls began doing strange things. Suppose he started carving his initials on the fence rails with one of his horns. That would be rather exceptional, wouldn't it?"

"Off-hand, I'd say yes."

"And what would your reaction be—you in your comfortable ranch-house. What would your reaction be?"

Davis yawned. "I'd probably want to make the acquaintance of this remarkable bull."

"So would I."

"And now, may we sleep?"

"You may—after you give me your shoes."

"My shoes."

"Right."

"They're under the foot of my cot."

Tony got to his feet and went to where Candy lay holding the sleeping dark girl in her arms. "How is she?"

"All right—now I guess."

"Let me have your shoes."

"But—"

"Your shoes." Tony bent down and slipped them from Candy's feet.

A while later, Davis raised up on his elbow. "Will you please stop dropping those shoes?" He opened his eyes and looked at Tony. "What on earth are you doing?"

"Carving my initials on a fence rail." Tony stood in the center of the room tossing the shoes into the air.

"Isn't it a little late in your life to take up juggling?"

"I fooled around with it years ago. When I was a boy. Got quite good at it. Just brushing up."

Davis lay down and closed his eyes. "Do as you like. I suppose it's as good a way as any to pass the time . . ."

The following morning the captives were again fed. After breakfast, three aliens entered and stood grouped by the door. They were looking over the captives, talking among themselves.

Tony picked up two shoes and began juggling them. The aliens looked at him with casual interest, made some comments to each other. Then they selected one man and one woman and led them from the room.

Davis and Tony glanced at each other. Candy said, "It looks as though they're going to be assigned to their duties."

Davis said, "It looks that way."

Candy ran nervous fingers through her hair. "I almost wish they'd have picked me. Slaving in a furnace room would be better than waiting here."

"You're right, but don't be too eager. Maybe their furnace room is hotter than any of us bargain for." Tony added two more shoes and went on juggling.

"What do you mean?" Candy asked, looking up quickly.

"Nothing."

"Why do you keep tossing those shoes in the air? Can't you find something better to do?"

"Can you?"

Candy sank down on her cot. "No, I guess not. I'm sorry if I sounded cross."

"Think nothing of it. You're doing a fine job of holding your nerves together."

The next morning two more victims were selected. Tony was juggling four shoes when the aliens entered. They stopped to watch him. They stayed for almost five minutes before they took their victims away.

After they had left Davis spoke to Tony in a low voice. "We could be wrong, you know."

Tony's mouth was grim. "Do you think we are?"

Davis' face had deep lines in it, deeper than when Tony had first seen him in the ruined street. Davis sat down on his cot and put his head in his hands. "No, I don't think so. But I wish they'd pick me and get it over with."

"Why?"

Davis looked up and smiled without humor. "Perhaps so I wouldn't have to watch you juggle those damned shoes."

"Tomorrow I hope to be able to handle six."

Davis watched for a while and said, "Sorry I snapped at you. That's one thing that mustn't happen. They mustn't get us fighting among ourselves."

Tony grinned. "Right you are. Now I'm going to try six. Watch this."

He was juggling six shoes on the following morning when the aliens came and selected the dark girl and an-

other of the men. "Looks like the capacity of the tanning plant is two a day," Davis said in a low, choked voice. He got up from his cot. "Let's charge them. Let's not sit here like dumb brutes!"

"Quiet!" Tony said sharply.

The aliens were leaning against the wall, watching Tony manipulate six shoes. They talked it over among themselves and his mind ached to know what they were saying. He watched them without appearing to and saw the eyes of one gesture toward the ceiling as though referring to someone or something beyond it. His heart missed a beat. Maybe—maybe—maybe—this was it. He said a prayer and kept on juggling. He risked a turn or two behind his back and got away with it. One of the aliens actually smiled.

Tony prayed. *Look at me! Look, you slobs! Look at this stupid bull carving his initials with his horns. Do something about it.*

The aliens left and Tony let the shoes crash to the floor. He bent over and picked one up and carried it to the cot and sat down. He said, "Quick! Help me get the knife out of this bandage!"

Candy pushed his fumbling

hands away and started unwrapping the cloth. "Why, Tony?"

"Because this is it."

Davis held the shoe. "How do you know?"

"I don't. I just know it's got to be it or I've wasted my time. I've given them the whole show. I haven't got any more."

"I wish you'd tell me what you've got in mind," Candy said plaintively.

Tony took the knife and the shoe Davis held. He thrust the knife point first into the shoe and jammed it down so it would stay. Then he set the four shoes in a row at the foot of his cot and lay back as though exhausted. "This has got to be it or we're finished and done for."

Candy reached out and took his hand. "Tony—I don't understand you. I just don't!"

Davis said, "It's just his way of reacting, that's all. Each of us is under a strain—each trying to hold onto his own sanity in a world gone mad."

"But Tony," Candy said, "If you'd only try to explain. Maybe I could understand."

Tony lay back and locked his hands behind his head. "It's a crazy thing I'm trying to do and it will fail but I've got to try and do something."

"What are you trying to do?"

"Something that's no doubt based on a fallacy. That's the danger. You build up a thing and if the foundation-idea is wrong, your whole thing is wrong. It has to be."

"Just what is your foundation-idea, old man?" Davis asked the question softly. In the manner, Tony thought, that you would address the weak-minded.

"This: That if the cats had taken over leadership on this planet, they would have followed their basic instincts no matter how far they advanced; that even though they managed to split the atom, their national game would have to do with stalking game through a forest. Their big hero wouldn't be a ball player who could hit three-fifty—it would be a tiger who could pick off an antelope with a fifty-yard leap."

Both Candy and Davis were silent. Tony opened his eyes. "Neither of you know what I'm talking about, do you?"

"Of course we do, darling," Candy said.

"Then you're both smarter than I am because—"

The door opened. Three aliens entered. Davis whispered, "Looks as though the

capacity has been stepped up."

The aliens came down the aisle and stopped by Tony's cot. One of them motioned. Tony got off the cot and started toward the door but the alien motioned again and Tony came back and started to pick up the three pairs of shoes.

He made a bad job of it, apparently not being able to hold them all at once. Finally the alien gestured toward Davis. Tony handed him four of the shoes and said, "Come on. This is it maybe. Let's hope so."

At the door, Tony waved at Candy and smiled. He called, "Hold everything, honey. We'll be back. It's a promise . . ."

"A promise you'll never keep," Davis said grimly as they stood in an elevator with the three aliens.

"Probably not, but we never admit such things, do we? We keep our heads up and march smartly and hope for the best, don't we?"

"I guess we do," Davis said sadly.

On some upper floor, they were conducted along another corridor. This one was different however, more ornate, decorated with fine, highly

polished wood; heavily carpeted.

"We must be nearing the front office," Tony said.

"Possibly the head man needs exercise. Probably intends to skin us personally."

"Either that or he needs a pair of shoes."

"We'd better get where we're going pretty quick or we'll run out of brilliant bits."

The place they were going turned out to be one of breath-taking magnificence. Rich draperies and ornaments of precious metal. The room through which they walked would have beggared the palace of an Indian Rajah.

Then they went through another door and they saw her . . .

She was by far the most beautiful female Tony had ever set eyes on. She was tall, well over six feet, and every inch was perfectly proportioned. She wore a glittering robe and her hair cascaded down her back in shining golden waves.

But Tony was far more interested in the change that came over the three aliens. They changed from casual, efficient males into trembling ineffectuals. They kept their eyes lowered and Tony thought of a devout Christian

approaching not a relic, but the actual Presence of his God.

The woman regarded Tony and Davis with interest. A differently uniformed male stood with head bowed near the throne upon which she sat and she carried on all communication with the three aliens through this personage.

The five of them advanced to a point where the three dropped to their knees and placed their foreheads on the floor. The woman spoke to the minister beside her and he apparently asked the leader of the three a question. The alien writhed with pleasure at the attention and gestured toward the throne. The gesture was evidently meant for Tony because the minister duplicated it.

Tony thought: *The ranch owner certainly wouldn't expect the bull to be reverent,* and so he advanced to the base of the dais supporting the throne. The minister pointed toward the shoes.

Tony smiled and said, "Okay, Davis. We go into our act. You stand here beside me and hold out the shoes." He began with only two. Then gradually augmented the circle of flying footwear until he had six flying in a circle. He saw the look of amusement on

the face of the woman. He tried a back-toss. This fascinated her and she leaned forward, smiling. The minister smiled also but evidently at the woman's pleasure because he kept his eyes upon her and paid no attention to Tony.

Tony took a deep breath. The circle of shoes moved forward slightly and he was forced to put a foot on the first step of the dais in order to keep it going. Neither the woman nor the minister objected. Tony tried a second step. That left three.

On the third, the minister frowned and held forth a protesting hand and Tony thought: *This is it. Which shoe, now—which shoe?*

Then five shoes fell in a clatter as he grasped the sixth in a firm hand and snatched forth the knife. The minister took a forward step.

But he was too slow because Tony had already leaped up the three remaining steps and jammed the knife squarely into the woman's heart.

The woman screamed. The scream turned to a blood-choked gurgle as she toppled from the throne.

Tony grabbed Davis by the arm and pulled him back against the wall. He said, "Grab something—anything!

Maybe we can kill one or two before they get us."

Davis' mouth was hanging open. "You killed her," he babbled. "Killed her."

"That was the general idea."

Davis lifted a vase from a table and held it with numb fingers. He could never have used it as a weapon but this was not necessary. The minister knelt by the side of the fallen woman and a shrill moan came from his lips. The three aliens arose and fell back to the doorway. They caught up the minister's moan and rocked back and forth in abject grief. Other aliens came into the room until it was crowded. The moaning heightened until it grated on Tony's ears.

He and Davis were completely ignored. It was as though they were not present; as though they were beyond the wall of grief that rose up to surround the aliens.

Tony said, "Let's go."

"That's crazy! They wouldn't let us."

"We can try. Just walk toward the door."

They walked toward the door and the aliens continued to pay them no attention as the tempo of frenzied grief increased. In the outer corri-

dor they found that the knowledge of the woman's death had run through the ship. Crowds of the green-suited aliens ran in panic through the halls.

"What's come over them?" Davis muttered.

"It's very simple. Their queen is dead."

Davis looked at him dully without understanding, then said, "Look—they're all trying to get up higher—fighting up the stairs—crowding the elevators—"

"Let's find a port."

They found a heavy quartz glass and looked out over demolished Manhattan. But that was not what held Tony's gaze. His attention was riveted to the stream of aliens pouring from the overhead ports; circling in panic and then forming into a patternless cloud—a swarm—and winging off to sea on their strange sticks.

"It won't take the army long now," he said.

And even as he spoke, a flight of lurking jets rocketed down from the sky and poured annihilation into the fleeing swarm . . .

The President's statement read "Our prayers have been answered. For some reason beyond our understanding, the

enemy left the cover of their ship and have been wiped out over the Atlantic Ocean. We believe the ship is empty, but radio-activity makes it impossible to investigate for some time.

"I am frank to reveal that we do not know the reason for our victory. I can only set aside this day as one of humble thanksgiving. Go to your churches and thank God for our deliverance . . ."

Tony sat on his cot and held Candy's hand tight in his own. "I didn't expect to be so right," he said. "I was just going on a wild hunch—a series of hunches based on a precept I could hardly believe myself. You know the precept, but I didn't tell you how I arrived at my belief that these creatures came from a planet where the insects, not the mammals, got the upper hand evolutionwise."

"Then tell us," Candy said impatiently.

"Their fear of smoke was one thing. Staying up until the smoke of their attack had died—confiscating all tobacco and matches. Then there was the formations they held in the sky; exactly like bees returning to the hive. And the whining, buzzing form of their speech."

"And you figured that if they had an insect heritage—"

"That they would leave the hive when their queen died." He smiled wearily. "Silly, wasn't it?"

"It worked, old man," Davis said. "Nothing is silly that works."

Tony looked into Candy's eyes. "And now there's something else I must tell you."

"What, darling?"

"We're probably doomed."

"Doomed?"

"Yes, Davis and I tried to work those sticks before we came back. It was impossible. They must have been attuned to some power in the bodies of the aliens; possibly the same power with which they administered the stinging death. Anyhow, if we went out there it would be fatal. The radio-activity would cut us down."

"Can't we just stay here and wait until the army comes?"

"Yes, but in the meantime we may be dead. The ship is

already ceasing to function. The lights will go out soon. The ice has already melted and we're sitting on the bottom of the East River. By the time the navy sends down divers and penetrated the hull of this ship, we will probably be dead. There is only so much oxygen."

"And we weren't able to completely close the ports after the aliens left," Davis said.

Candy sat quiet for a few moments. Then she smiled at Tony. "It's all right. At least we have a little time together."

"A little time."

Davis got up from the cot. "Then I'd suggest you start enjoying it," he said. "I'll go tell the others."

He went away and Tony kissed Candy and whispered. "Don't worry. Everything's going to be all right. I've got a hunch."

She kissed him back. "Your hunches are good enough for me, darling," she said.

THE END

NO PLACE TO LIVE

By MILTON LESSER

Ward learned the prison warden isn't the guy who gives you trouble; it's the toughest of the convicts. He learned it—the hard way!

I'LL COME back," Ward said.

"They never do," Olafson, the pilot of the battered Ganymedian tub told him, shrugging his mammoth shoulders indifferently.

"But I will."

"Just give me the money, Mr. Ward."

"Here," Ward said, already heading for the airlock with the spacesuit helmet under his left arm. "Fifty credits is what you wanted, isn't it?"

"You better give me all of it, son."

"On Mars, you said fifty credits."

The Ganymedian pilot laughed. "On Mars you might have changed your mind."

Ward cursed him mechanically, without feeling, and handed over all his money, which was three hundred credits.

"Hell," the Ganymedian said. "You won't need the money where you're going.

And you can't return. You're a grown man, Ward. You ought to know that. I can lose my rating taking you this close to Prison Planet. It's got to be worth my while."

"All right, just open the airlock for me."

"I can't figure you out, Ward. Why the hell should any man want to go to Prison Planet who ain't condemned to go there? A woman, I been telling myself. It's got to be a woman. She must be some piece—"

Ward's big right fist traveled half a foot in a quick hard blurring cross which ended on the point of the Ganymedian's jaw, tumbling Olafson to the floor of the control cabin. Then Ward got the fishbowl helmet in place over his head and his voice hissed sibilantly through the suit radio. "Will you open the airlock or shall I do it myself?"

The Ganymedian climbed unsteadily to his feet and

never said another word to Ward. After Ward entered the small chamber, the pilot activated the airlock mechanism. Five minutes later Ward hung in space and watched the gray hull of the obsolescent Ganymedian freighter move off slowly against the awesome black star-dazzling backdrop of space.

Then Ward switched on his shoulder rockets, full power on left, half power on right, swinging slowly around in space. It was exactly the same way a condemned man reached Prison Planet, he thought. The police ship brought you out, though, and left you within shoulder-rocketing distance of Ceres. You could make planetfall or drift in space until your air gave out, as you wished. Except for the inspection ship, twice a decade, no spaceship ever touched down on Ceres.

They called it Planet of Oblivion. They called it a lot of things. It was the last planetfall of condemned criminals, murderers and incorrigibles. There were no guards, no bars, no prison walls and cell blocks and regimented labor routines. There was only Ceres, the bleak asteroid, a hundred million miles from nowhere.

It swam into view before Ward's eyes now, dun-colored, its unexpectedly low albedo reflecting sunlight dimly. It expanded up to meet Ward, who was matching precisely its low speed of escape with his shoulder rockets.

He was the first man—and would probably hold for a long time his distinction as the only man—to reach Prison Planet voluntarily, he thought with grim humor. He wondered if it would help Olafson's aching jaw if the Ganymedian knew it *was* a woman that brought him out here.

Then he busied himself swinging around in the thin upper regions of Ceres' atmosphere, using his shoulder rockets to brake his swift passage through the friction-shrieking air.

Far above him, catching sunlight on its battered hull, Olafson's spaceship was a slowly-moving and not very bright star.

"The Infernal Verities," Caesar Joy said, and chuckled. He was an enormously fat man. "To misquote an ancient platitude," he added, chuckling again. He was seated on a stone slab which he called his throne. His huge bloated abdomen sat his fat-layered



Deaf to the girl's protests, they began to seal the cave.

thighs as an inexperienced rider sits a horse, and bounced up and down in precisely the same fashion as he chuckled.

"Truth and beauty and wisdom and the good life," he said. "Equate them all and what do you have? You have power, that's what. Here on Ceres, you have Caesar Joy. Well, don't you?"

"You're wasting your breath, Mr. Joy," the girl said. She was a tall lithe girl, strong-limbed and quite beautiful. Caesar Joy liked her spirit. He would like even more the possibility of breaking that fine unfettered spirit slowly, bending it to his will. He had come to Ceres fifteen years ago, a young, cadaverously thin convicted mass-murderer. He was now the most powerful man on Ceres, a place where power stood for everything. He weighed three hundred pounds, which more than doubled his weight of fifteen years ago. He took great pride in his obesity, as if it proved his power.

"Listen," he said. "You're not even listening. You think I want you for a wife or something like that? I'm not interested in wives. What do I care for wives? Jung, not Freud, you see? Power, not sex, is at the root of everything."

The girl, whose name was Helen Langdon and who had been condemned to Ceres for a crime of which she was innocent, seemed genuinely surprised. "Then what do you want?" she asked Caesar Joy.

"Join my bodyguards," he said.

"Now you're joking."

"No, I mean it."

"I—I'm a girl."

"Who brought you here, Helen?"

"Why, two women and a little plump man with a squeaky voice."

Caesar Joy chuckled again. "My bodyguards," he said. "The man was a gelding, you see. On Ceres, a strong man does not surround himself with other strong men, if he wants to survive. He surrounds himself with the strongest available women and with geldings. Then he has a chance to survive. Don't you see?" he went on eagerly. "A man always thinks in terms of power for himself. A woman rarely does. A gelding, never. That's why Caesar Joy is the strongest man on Ceres today."

"My people are loyal. They depend on me, so I can depend on them. What happened to Stark, my dear Helen?"

"I never heard of Stark."

"Of course. You're new

here. Stark was my one serious competitor in this pleasant anarchistic society of ours. But his lieutenants became ambitious. Stark's dead now and his lieutenants are still fighting among themselves. You see? That can't happen to Caesar Joy."

"I couldn't be less interested," Helen said coldly.

Patiently, Caesar Joy told her, "The first thing you must get through your pretty head is this: you are never going to leave Ceres. You are going to spend your life here. Then, when you understand that, you'll come to me. I won't force you. I never force people. Not even my geldings."

"I can go now?"

"Certainly. Certainly."

The two women, each armed with a sling and a knife, and the gelding, who carried a spear, escorted Helen Langdon from the great man's presence.

In the old days of warfare on Earth, Ward thought, paratroopers must have felt like this. He came down slowly, using every ounce of remaining rocket fuel to brake his fall. He had intended to make planetfall on the night side of Ceres and so land unseen, but wind currents had forced him around to full day-

light. Since he had barely enough fuel to brake his fall, that was it.

He seemed suspended several hundred feet over the barren, craggy Cerescape. Falling away to his left to meet the unexpectedly close horizon was a flat boulder-strewn moraine, testifying to Ceres' former status as an icebound asteroid before man came with artificial heat and artificial atmosphere and changed it to Prison Planet. Immediately below Ward and to his right, a low range of bare, jagged, fang-toothed mountains bit hungrily at the sky.

He came down where the mountains flattened out to form the moraine and at the last moment, when it was too late to change the course on which his shoulder rockets were carrying him, he saw the people down there. They had hid themselves in the craggy foothills and now came out boldly, watching him, pointing up at him and grinning as if he were going to be the butt of some unexplained joke.

Alighting with a jolt, he rolled over and scrambled quickly, warily to his feet. The nearest people, not fifty yards away, were already rushing toward him.

"Keep back!" he cried. "I've got a gun."

He brandished the weapon, and it surprised them. They halted instantly. They circled him warily and spoke in excited whispers among themselves. A condemned man just wasn't set down on Ceres with an atomic pistol. Nor did a condemned man wear the kind of clothing Ward wore.

The gun would be a great help, he knew. He was the only man on Ceres with a lethal weapon other than the makeshift spears, slings, knives and bows. Holding them at bay with the atomic pistol, he watched them form a tight crowd thirty yards in front of him. They seemed a savage lot, the women as well as the men. All wore the identical Prison Planet clothing, the gray jumper and boots which had been issued them before arrival on Ceres. Some of the older ones, Ward observed, had gone to incredible lengths to keep their garments in repair.

"Who are you?" someone called to Ward. "You ain't just a newcomer like one of us. You're different."

"I'm here," Ward said evasively. If he told them he had come of his own free will, they might not trust him. And although Ceres was only an

asteroid, it was the largest of them—with a diameter of better than four hundred miles. You couldn't expect to make planetfall and find Helen without any help.

"With that gun? Is that something new?"

"Maybe he's one of Caesar Joy's people," someone else suggested. "Maybe Caesar Joy's found a way to make guns."

"How, stupid?" a woman demanded.

"Don't call me stupid," the man said.

"Stupid," she said, taunting him.

With no further preamble, the man and woman turned on each other tooth and nail and were soon scuffling on the bare, dusty ground. Soon the others, men and women indiscriminately, joined in. The mob became a thrashing, tumbling, twisting tangle of arms and legs. Ward stood watching them, astounded. He had read a few pseudo-scientific guesses as to the nature of life on Prison Planet, and so he had not come entirely unprepared. But that human beings could degenerate to such pointless savagery . . .

No, he thought. Not entirely pointless. Hydroponic food

gardens provided them with food and drink. There was no animal life on Ceres, and no plant life. There was no social structure, no occupations, no governments, no necessity to work, no jobs to do, no money as a means to trade and nothing worth trading for in a barter system. There were none of the aspects of life and civilization paralleling life and civilization on Earth and the colonial worlds. There were only people—the condemned, the forgotten and the offspring of the condemned and forgotten. There was only pettiness and bickering and a world without real meaning and real substance in which a free-for-all like this needed no motivation and could be the big event of the day.

Ward turned and walked away slowly. He'd have to find one of their communities, he thought. He'd have to approach them differently, steal one of the gray jumpers, perhaps, hide his gun and go among them as one of their own kind.

Suddenly he felt a weight clinging to his back. He stumbled forward and almost fell. Knees dug into his sides and a bare arm circled his neck from behind. "I've got him!" a young boy screamed insane-

ly in Ward's ear. "I've got him!"

Ward dropped to one knee, leaned forward and flung the boy over his shoulder. But by then others had reached him. Two men and a woman leaped on him, forcing him down. They were laughing as they fought. They used elbows, teeth and feet as well as their fists. One of the men wrenched the atomic pistol from Ward's hand and clubbed him across the face with it, laughing all the while.

Someday, Helen Langdon thought, she would have to make the choice. Caesar Joy—old Jelly-belly, they called him at Free City, but with respect—or one of the other petty rulers of Ceres. Because no one remained long in Free City. You remained in Free City only long enough to make up your mind.

In a way, Joy's right, she told herself. I ought to get it through my head: I'm never going to leave Ceres. One simply doesn't. The new fact of life for the condemned criminal in the Twenty-third Century. But damn it and damn them, I'm innocent.

Free City—the word "city" was used loosely, Helen realized with a wry smile—was a cluster of caves high in the

jagged ice-carved hills of Ceres. You lived there and weren't bothered by Ceres' petty rulers, except for recruiting purposes, until you made up your mind. But you didn't stay long. Six Earth months was the record, and they still spoke of it in Free City with awe in their voices. That had been old Jelly-belly himself, fifteen years ago, and then, instead of joining one of the existing factions, he had struck out on his own. Now, fifteen years later, he was the most powerful man on Ceres. Fifteen years and a hundred and fifty pounds later, Helen thought, recounting the old legend to herself. Caesar Joy was proud of every added pound, as if it proved he was free, in a world of anarchy, to do exactly as he wished—which seemed to be, mostly, eating.

Helen climbed the steep slope to her cave. Harry Dunster, who had the adjacent cave, was sunning himself on the ledge. Something in Ceres' artificial atmosphere, much of which had been melted from its frozen state on Ceres' barren rocks by the Prison Planning Commission long ago, strengthened the rays of the distant sun.

"Did they dun you good, kid?" Harry Dunster asked,

not opening his eyes as he lay on the ledge in the sunlight. He had removed the top of his jumper and the skin of his chest was already bronzed and leathery looking. He was a young man, very thin and very sardonic in appearance. He never talked about Earth. He talked about Ceres as if he had been here forever, although he had reached Prison Planet only a week before Helen. No one knew what his crime had been, so in the rumors which went the rounds of Free City he had been accused of everything from paid political assassination to wife-slashing.

"They'll leave me alone until I make up my mind," Helen said.

"That's what you think, kid. It's a subtle campaign, but they'll get you. You're pretty lucky. Caesar Joy does not offer everyone a job."

"What about you, Harry?"

"Oh, I don't know. There's no rush." Dunster winked at her. "I'll tell you something, kid. I actually like it here. Don't look at me like that, I ain't kidding. You don't have to do a damn thing but just sit around. All my life I always wanted to go someplace where I could just sit around."

"Maybe you committed

your crime on purpose," Helen said, and laughed.

"You know," Dunster told her, "maybe you ought to spread that rumor around. It should get a rise out of some of the folks around here. Well, I think I'll go on inside and take a nap."

"All right," Helen said.

"Say, kid. Ever wondered why I ain't made a pass at you?"

"No," Helen said.

"I'll tell you anyhow. Because it's too much like work. Because I'm really relaxing the first time in my life. Well, see ya." And Harry Dunster waved airily at her and ambled inside his own cave.

Helen stood on the ledge and felt the strangely strong sunlight on her face. That Harry Dunster was a character, she decided, but he was exactly the kind of counterpoint you needed on a place like Ceres. She almost wished she could be like him. She was about to enter her own cave, when she heard him scream.

She whirled swiftly and headed along the ledge for the entrance to Dunster's cave. A running figure burst out into the sunlight from the dimness of the cave-opening. Helen had never seen the man before, but for some reason

she tried to stop him. He was a withered old man with surprising strength in his scrawny limbs and although she got her arms around him and pinned his own arms to his sides for a moment, he broke loose and leaped from the ledge to the next one below it and from that to the next, negotiating the cliffside with all the surefootedness of a mountain goat. Soon he had disappeared entirely. The most notable thing about him aside from his unexpected strength was his tattered, ragged shirt, which seemed to cling to his body by means of a thread here and there. But slung across one of his shoulders, Helen had seen Harry Dunster's crisp gray jumper shirt. It was a very fine shirt, in excellent shape, because Dunster hardly wore it.

Clothing and weapons, Helen realized grimly, were the two items worth stealing on Ceres. And Harry Dunster had screamed. He was bigger than the old man and probably stronger. Her heart suddenly pounding rapidly, almost painfully, Helen plunged into the dark cave.

It took several seconds for her eyes to grow accustomed to the dimness. She had groped her way inside to the rear of the small cave and not

gradually but suddenly, as if a light had been turned on, she could see. She whimpered and stared down at Harry Dunster, who was sprawled out on his back, his arms and legs spread-eagled, the haft of a knife protruding from his chest.

Helen ran outside, her fingers clutching and unclutching. He's dead, she thought. For a shirt. It could have been any one of us. A shirt's important. It's very important here. There's no new clothing. There never will be, except as arrives on the backs of newly condemned men. It could have been any one of us. It could have been me.

"... Girlie, I'm talking to you. Girlie!"

Her vision swam. She looked up. She was outside on the ledge again. She had not remembered going outside. The man was familiar, a tall thin fellow who lived in one of the nearby caves, who had come on the same prison ship that had brought Helen to within five thousand miles of the hell-hole called Ceres.

"Yes?" she said. "Yes, what do you want?"

"Harry inside?"

"Yes, no, you—you can't go in there. Don't go in there."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. I—"

But the man looked at her suspiciously and went into Harry Dunster's cave. He was out again in a moment, shouting. Helen stood perfectly still, not trying to go anywhere, but he held her arm and said, "Don't try to get away. Don't move at all." And, louder: "Hey, down there! Help! She killed him. Knifed him, that's what. Hey, down there!"

Seconds passed. Minutes. She was not aware of the passage of time. There were a great many people on the ledge now, milling about in excitement, their eyes avid because the unexpected had happened. "Killed him in cold blood." "Hid the shirt somewhere." "No killing in Free City." "The unwritten law, no one gets bothered in Free City." "Things like that could ruin Free City, make it impossible for a man to make up his own mind about things." "She ought to be taught a lesson."

"But I didn't do it," Helen said. "I didn't kill him. It was a little old man."

"Didn't see any little old man."

"Ain't no little old man, you fool."

"Watch who you're calling a fool."

The apology was forthcoming at once. This was not the time for a free-for-all. There were too many interesting possibilities in the situation at hand.

"Now, then," someone said. "I heard about it from an old timer who came around to Free City recruiting. We could put her in the cave there with Dunster's body and seal up the entrance with stones."

The idea met with instant approval. They thrust Helen within the cave and several of them stood outside while others went for stones. Inside of an hour they had the entrance half-sealed and were working at a furious pace, sweating profusely in the strong sunlight, to complete the job.

Just then a plump little fellow appeared at the half-sealed entrance. They cleared a space for him quickly. They wanted no part of him. "Well, now," he said cheerfully. "It would seem I'm in the nick of time." He had a high squeaky voice and Helen, who stood inside the cave numbly, as in a dream, suddenly remembered him. He was Caesar Joy's gelding.

"What do you want?" someone outside asked him.

"The girl. I don't want her." He gave a lewd laugh. A few people chuckled along with the joke, which he had made at his own expense. "Caesar Joy wants her. He figured if he didn't get her now, he never would. Ain't that right, miss?"

Helen said nothing. If Caesar Joy had come in person on this mission, she would have leaped from the cave and flung herself at him and tried to reach his black heart through all the fat, because the gelding's arrival could mean only one thing. Caesar Joy already knew about the murder. If Caesar Joy knew about it, that was because Caesar Joy had had it performed. They'll use a subtle campaign on you, the dead Harry Dunster had said. Subtle? Murderous . . .

Naturally, she had no choice. She had absolutely no choice at all. She could either agree to go with the gelding or remain here to be sealed inside the cave with Harry Dunster's body.

"I was wondering," the gelding said drily, "if you had changed your mind. Are you ready to join Caesar Joy now?"

Helen didn't answer him at first. She wondered if the

Free City people would let her go. Someone said, "She can't go anywhere, friend. She's staying here to—"

"Oh?" demanded the gelding mildly. "I don't think so. I really don't think so. Free City couldn't defend itself very well, could it? Against Caesar Joy? Come, my dear." The gelding offered his hand to Helen.

When the man who had spoken still barred their way, the gelding turned to him, smiled politely, and spit in his face. The man bellowed but was instantly restrained by his companions. The gelding bowed to all of them and led the dazed Helen down the ledge, holding her hand and whistling a tune which had been popular ten years ago.

Ward's head ached stiffly. He did not have to grope about in the darkness to know that the atomic pistol was gone. He smiled, the slight movement of facial muscles bringing more pain. That gun might alter the precarious balance of power on Ceres, if any existed.

He stood up and felt a cool wind blow across his face. He cursed himself for a blundering fool. The weapon had been important. The weapon had been essential. It gave

him speed. It was wings. And he needed speed, for he had not selected this time at random to come to Ceres. Every five years at regular intervals, he knew, an Earth government inspection ship visited Ceres. It remained for a day and departed. It was purely a gesture to appease Earth politicians, but for Ward and Helen—if he could find her—it was salvation. If he did not find her in time, they would be stuck on Ceres for five years.

The inspection ship was coming tomorrow.

"He's awake," a woman's voice said.

Something was thrust at him. It was a cup. The liquid it contained was hot and palatable. Ward drank.

A man said, "I don't know as we ought to hold him. Old Jelly-belly won't like it."

"We got to chance it," the woman insisted. "You saw the gun, didn't you? Maybe he hid it somewhere."

"Yeah, maybe," the man said doubtfully. "But the gelding Amos is on his way here with a new recruit. If Amos sees us holding this man, you know Amos will tell old Jelly-belly. Then where will we be?"

"What's the matter with you?" the woman spat con-

temptuously. "Are you a gelding too? Don't you have any guts?"

"Well, I—"

The woman turned to Ward. "Man," she said, "we want to know about that weapon of yours."

"Someone took it," Ward said.

"You see?" the man demanded.

"A likely story," the woman said disgustedly. "Hit him, Hardy."

The man, whose name was Hardy, advanced on Ward. His eyes had dilated for the darkness now; he could see the man. He waited until the man swung on him awkwardly, then stepped inside the telegraphed roundhouse blow and sent the man reeling with a short hard left hook. Hardy moaned, lost his balance and fell down. Ward stood over him, the knuckles of his left hand throbbing.

Ward felt something sharp prick his side. "I've got a knife," the woman said. "I could kill you for trespassing. This is Caesar Joy's territory. No one would bat an eyelash. I want the truth."

"I already told you," Ward said.

The woman nudged Hardy with her foot. "Get up," she said. Hardy stood up unstead-

ily and glared at Ward, who began to wonder if he could brush the knife away before the woman drove it between his ribs.

"Listen," Ward said grimly. "I'm not like the rest of you. I came here because I wanted to. I came to get someone. I don't plan to stay. I'll kill anyone who tries to stop me."

"Sure," the woman said, amusement in her voice. "You came here of your own free will. I'll bet."

"You can think anything you want to. I'm only warning you, that's all."

"You mean," the woman mocked him, "you ain't interested in winning friends and influencing people on Ceres, is that it?"

"Yes," Ward said. "I'm not going to spend the rest of my life here."

"If that's how you feel, if it's bothering you like that, Caesar Joy will probably figure he ought to geld you for safety's sake."

Ward swung his right hand down suddenly in a swift arc, the edge of his palm striking the woman's wrist. The knife clattered on the rocks at her feet. Ward shoved her away and picked up the knife himself. The woman cursed softly

and steadily. Hardy cringed behind her.

"Now listen," Ward said. "If a girl arrived here a month ago, where would I find her now?"

The woman did not answer. Hardy said, "Well, first she'd go over to one of the Free Cities and sit around a while, making up her mind whose outfit she wanted to join. If she was lucky, she'd join this outfit. Caesar Joy's."

"Why this one?"

"Because it's the biggest and the best. The strongest."

"Could she still be in the Free City?"

"After a month?" Hardy said. "You better not believe it."

"What's her name?" the woman asked Ward suddenly.

"Helen Langdon."

"Nope. Never heard of her. I'll bet she's innocent, though."

"Why, yes," said Ward. "But how—"

The woman cackled and nudged Hardy repeatedly with her elbow. "She must be young and pretty," laughed the woman, who was neither. "All the young and pretty ones say they're innocent."

Just then a voice called to them from the darkness. It was a high-pitched voice and it squeaked. Ward had never

heard a voice like it before. The voice called: "Hey, there. Post eleven. Where the devil are you?"

"I told you!" Hardy hissed at the woman. "I told you we should have been careful. That's the gelding Amos."

"Take it easy," the woman warned him in a tight whisper. Then, aloud: "Taking a breather, Amos. Everything's fine."

"Well, you ought to watch your post," insisted the squeaky voice, which was coming closer. "You want me to tell old Jelly-belly?"

"It won't happen again," the woman assured Amos the gelding.

"All right, all right," Amos squeaked. "Check me in, will you? I've got a new recruit and I'm hungry."

Suddenly, Amos came into view. He was a small plump man. He had narrow shoulders and a rolling fluid way of walking, as if he never lifted his feet from the ground. At first Ward didn't see the girl behind him. When she finally came into view she walked very slowly, her head lolling forward, almost down to her chest. In the near darkness, Ward couldn't see her face.

"I had to drug her," Amos explained. "She was almost

hysterical." He laughed briefly. "They were going to seal her in a cave with a dead man."

The girl whimpered, as if Amos' words conjured up something unpleasant. She lifted her head and said in a flat voice, "I didn't kill him."

Ward leaped forward quickly and thrust the surprised gelding aside. "Helen!" he said. "Helen!"

She looked at him at first without recognition. "I swear I didn't kill him," she said. "I only went in the cave and found him there. You've got to believe me."

"Look at me," Ward said. He grasped her shoulders and shook them, staring into her eyes. They seemed faraway, unseeing. He wondered what kind of drug the gelding had used. He had to fight down a wild impulse to turn on the gelding savagely and beat his head against the rocks.

Helen stood there without recognizing him. The gelding was smiling. Ward said, "You're taking her to Caesar Joy? Take me, too. I'll join you."

Amos shook his head. "You're new, aren't you? You have to go to one of the Free Cities. You have to be recruited."

"Damn you!" Ward cried, and lunged at the gelding. With surprising agility, Amos slipped away from him. Ward went after him, aware of Helen standing there, still without recognition. Hardy was standing on the other side of him, his eyes big with fright. Too late, Ward realized that Hardy's woman companion was nowhere in sight. He heard a slight noise behind him and half turned to meet it.

The woman had lifted a heavy rock over her head with both hands. She was bringing it down toward Ward's head now, and even as he lifted his arm and tried to block it, he knew he was too late. The last thing he remembered was thinking that if he had not blocked it partially, if something instinctive had not warned him, the heavy rock would have crushed his skull, killing him then and there.

Then it struck him on the side of the head and for Ward what little light there was went out.

It was much more satisfying than a woman, Caesar Joy thought. This slim lovely tube of metal which he held in his hand was the embodiment of everything that mattered. It

was the sum total of all that was important on Ceres.

It was an atomic pistol. Somehow, it had been brought to Ceres. How, did not matter. Caesar Joy possessed it, that was what mattered. He caressed it. He felt a genuine fondness for the cold metal. He chuckled, feeling the fat of his abdomen bounce and jiggle against his thighs. For an enterprising young fellow in one of the Free Cities, the weapon had been a passport to Caesar Joy's organization. The young man had been shocked though, when he learned that he would either remain a border guard of no importance or else had to be gelded. He hadn't made up his mind yet. It usually took time.

Caesar Joy snorted. The fool. The fool. He lacked imagination. The atomic pistol didn't need a Caesar Joy to fire it. Had the young man been gifted with sufficient imagination, he would have kept the weapon for himself. Even a Caesar Joy could not stand up for long against an atomic pistol with a virtually inexhaustible fuel supply. But the young man had lacked imagination; and Joy, already the most powerful man on Ceres, was now guaranteed his power as long as he lived.

Of course, he would have

to be careful. Like today, for example. Today the inspection ship was touching down on Ceres, had already touched down as a matter of fact. It would not do for them to see the atomic pistol. That was one of the things they would not permit. They might hear rumors about it, though. Caesar Joy could not prevent the rumors, which always swept across Ceres' bleak surface with amazing swiftness. Still, it hardly mattered. The inspection people were meeting the requirements of their job. They didn't expect to find anything of importance on Ceres. They would be in a hurry to leave. They always were.

Caesar Joy sighed happily and fondly caressed his new weapon.

"It ain't so bad being gelded," Amos the gelding insisted. "Look at me."

Ward, whose head was beginning to feel better now, didn't answer him, but Helen said, "Don't even talk about it. Not about Larry Ward like that."

Ward grinned. He reached out and squeezed Helen's hand. "I still can't believe it," she told him. "I can't believe you're here. I—but Larry, Larry! It means you'll have

to spend the rest of your life here. It means—"

"Listen," he said. "Come over here." He led her to the far end of the long narrow underground room. Amos the gelding made no move to follow them. Amos had said he would let Caesar Joy interview them and make the final decision about Ward.

"The inspection ship's coming today," Ward whispered to Helen. "Probably, it's already here. I timed it that way. That's why I came when I did. I have a friend in the inspection service. I—"

"Then Larry, you mean there's a chance we... we..."

"Yes," he said. "He's a doctor. The ship can't wait, but if there are people on Ceres who need medical treatment, and if the doctor says they'll have to be taken to some permanent hospital, say, on Io in the Jovian Moons, that's exactly what happens. Only, we won't reach the hospital. We'll be given personal rockets in space. Have you ever used shoulder rockets, Helen?"

"No."

"I'll teach you. We can go to Europa. We can have your face made over by plastic surgery, your fingerprints altered, your retinal pattern—"

"But Larry. On Earth, what happened there, I was innocent."

"I know you were," he said gently. "I know it. But they don't have police. They have machines. There's no appeal. The crime-fighting machines don't make mistakes. One in a million—"

"They made a mistake with me."

"One in a million, I said. We'd never prove it. We can only go away and start over."

Amos was walking toward them now. Helen clung to Ward and whispered, "I'd go anywhere with you. Anywhere."

Then Amos said, "Caesar Joy is coming now. If he makes an offer to geld you, I'd advise you to accept."

The stone door swung back. The most enormous man Ward had ever seen entered the underground room. Perhaps he had seen a few men as large, but there had been some meat to them. Caesar Joy was all fat.

"Ah, my dear," Caesar Joy said, looking at Helen. "I see you have decided to join us. We are delighted to have you. In a short time, perhaps tomorrow, you will be introduced into the organization by means of an orientation

program. Meanwhile," the small black eyes, like two tiny glittering black jade stones sunk deep in the fat of his face, turned to face Ward. They were the coldest eyes Ward had ever seen. "Meanwhile," Caesar Joy said, his voice suddenly no longer jovial, "we must consider your friend here. I see you aren't wearing the gray jumper of Ceres, fellow."

"No. I'm not."

"Care to explain it?" Joy's own jumper was not one but several, all stitched together neatly.

"Not particularly," Ward said boldly. He was aware of Amos sucking in his breath sharply. Caesar Joy's eyes still showed no expression.

"Care to explain *that*?" Joy said.

"I can't. I didn't come here the usual way. That's all."

"Hardy's wife has told me—"

"It doesn't matter what she told you," Ward said levelly. "Because I told her nothing but lies." Instinctively, he sensed he must take this course with Caesar Joy, without knowing quite why. He knew why a moment later, though, as Joy shifted his great weight from one columnar leg to the other as if he were unaccustomed to stand-

ing for more than a very few moments at a time, then reached under the shirt of his jumper with one tremendous, larded, dimpled hand and withdrew the atomic pistol, fingering it lovingly.

"Was this formerly yours?" Caesar Joy demanded.

Ward said nothing.

"It figures," Joy purred. "Doesn't it? You're not in prison uniform. You appear on Ceres. So does an atomic pistol. And Hardy's wife said it was yours."

"I told you, Hardy's wife—"

"It was his," Amos the gelding chirped. "A dozen people in the nearest Free City will swear to it."

"I suspected as much," said Caesar Joy with some regret in his voice. His enormous head swiveled from side to side, on literally no neck at all. "I suppose he will want it back, whatever he *says*. If a man comes here armed, he knows how important an atomic weapon, the only atomic weapon, can be on Ceres. Tell me, fellow," he asked abruptly, "will you consent to be gelded?"

"No," said Ward, wondering when the men from the inspection ship would arrive.

"Because you realize," Caesar Joy went on as if he had

not received an answer, "only a gelding is without real personal ambition. Is ambition linked, then, to sex? I suppose it is. Eh? You had better be gelded, my friend."

"If I refuse?"

"Are you going to refuse?"

"Yes," said Ward.

Caesar Joy looked at Amos. "Then I suppose you must kill him."

"Now?" asked Amos, piping.

"Now," said Caesar Joy, his tone casual.

Ward stood waiting, wondering by what means Amos would attempt to carry out the sentence of death. Helen bit her lip and looked at him mutely. Caesar Joy turned indifferently away, still holding the atomic pistol in his fat hand.

And then someone called from the corridor, "The inspection team is here."

Caesar Joy thrust the atomic pistol back within his jumper, shook his massive head at Amos. He was beaming from ear to ear when the three men in Earth-style clothing entered.

"So you are convict Joy," one of them said. "Everyone on Ceres talks about you." The man was small and squinted myopically. Ward

thought he wore contact lenses.

Ward said, "Excuse me. Isn't Dr. Sinclair with you people?"

Caesar Joy blinked, said nothing. Helen stared at Ward. The myopic man said, "Sinclair? Sinclair? Oh, yes. The M.D. Why, do you know him?"

When Ward didn't answer, the myopic little man said, "He's back at the ship. Set up a sort of clinic, you know."

At first Ward was dumbfounded, but then he realized Sinclair would have to do it this way. For Sinclair could not know in advance where on Ceres Ward would be. Sinclair would have to remain with the ship and hope for the best.

Except, Ward thought grimly, that the best wouldn't happen. Because as soon as the inspection team left, Caesar Joy was going to kill him.

Of course, if he could convince these men, who were not doctors, that he needed medical help . . .

He shrieked suddenly and hoped Helen would understand. He leaped not at Joy but at Amos, for Joy couldn't chance revealing the atomic pistol, but Amos apparently was armed.

He shrieked again. He let

froth bubble on his lips. He pounced on Amos and bore him to the floor, struggling. He got his fingers around Amos' neck and began to apply pressure. Amos writhed and struggled. Amos flipped about like a fish out of water. Ward went on shrieking.

He heard Helen say, "He always gets like that. Something's wrong with him. He needs help. Medical help." He could have kissed her. He felt them drag him off Amos, pulling him to his feet and pinning his arms. He began to blubber. He hoped it looked good.

Almost, it was too good. Amos got up and came for him with a knife. The three men from the inspection team had not expected violence. They stood there, holding Ward. Amos came at him expertly, the knife held low, balanced easily on his palm.

Ward kicked it from his hand and started to shriek again. Amos began to howl. Ward wondered if he'd broken the gelding's wrist.

Caesar Joy said, "We can take care of this man. I'm sure you are so busy, you wouldn't want to be bothered." For the first time, his small, fat-buried black eyes showed something. They showed fear. He didn't want

Ward out of his sight, alive. That was it, Ward thought. He knows I know he has the gun—

Ward broke loose from the inspection team. He hurled himself at Caesar Joy. The big man moved ponderously, trying to get out of his way. Ward followed him grimly and drove his right fist into the bloated stomach. He felt it sink in. It disappeared almost to the wrist. Caesar Joy stood there for several seconds with absolutely no expression on his face. Ward plucked the atomic pistol from under the fat man's jumper and held it up over his head. "Look," he said, trying to froth convincingly again. "Look what I found."

Caesar Joy fell suddenly, without warning. He hit the ground hard and lay there without moving. One of the inspection men said: "Where did he get that?"

They spoke about it for a while. They didn't know what to do. They would wait until Joy regained consciousness, they said. Naturally, they would confiscate the weapon.

"It's his," Amos said, pointing accusingly at Ward.

"It's mine!" Ward shouted gleefully. "It's mine!"

"Poor devil," one of the inspection team said. "How could it possibly be his?" He took the weapon from Ward. Ward did not try to stop him.

At that moment, Caesar Joy opened his eyes, blinked and stood up. "Give me that," he said. "Give me that. I want it."

"Keep back," the inspection man warned him.

His great ponderous body moving with unexpected swiftness, he flung himself at the man with the gun. He said, "You don't understand. You couldn't possibly. Here on Ceres—" He lunged for the weapon.

The man shot him and looked very surprised and a little sick when Caesar Joy lay dead at his feet.

"Nothing like this has ever happened before," the myopic man said. "I've been on three inspection trips. I know." He seemed to be apologizing. "Well," he said, "we'd better get this other fellow to Dr. Sinclair."

Ward giggled and performed a little dance for them. They shook their heads sadly. Except for the doctor back at the ship, Ward thought, there was not a man among them

who could cope with any serious situation. No serious situation had been expected.

Helen said, "I've been watching after him. I'll have to go along with him."

"Yes," said the myopic man. "Oh, yes." He sounded relieved.

The inspection ship blasted off on schedule. Dr. Sinclair examined Ward before blast-off, shook his head not sadly but wisely, and said he would have to take Ward to Io for treatment. Helen went along as Ward's nurse.

"You crazy fool!" Sinclair said to Ward in space—but happily.

"Yeah," said Ward.

Before they reached Io, Sinclair fitted them out with spacesuits. Europa was big in the viewport. On Europa they could start all over again.

"I ought to have my head examined," Sinclair said, "helping you in a fool stunt like this. But," he winked at Ward, "can I kiss the bride?"

Ten minutes later, Ward and Helen were floating freely in space. Europa and freedom swam up at them out of the inky blackness.

THE END



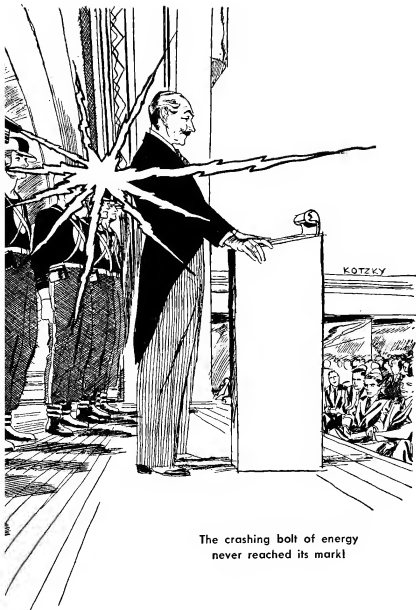
My Name is **MAYHEM**

By C. H. THAMES

Meet Mayhem—man of a thousand faces. He is loved and hated, honest and corrupt, good and evil. He is the mysterious juggler of cosmic politics; he can out-think and out-fight any enemy. He is immortal—yet in constant fear of death. (This is the first in a series of galactic adventures you won't want to miss!)

On almost every inhabited world of the galaxy there is some thread of the Johnny Mayhem legend. Because Mayhem is both culture hero and culture villain—here a latter-day Hercules or Thor, and there a Loki summoning Ragnarok to some morally delinquent world—the Mayhem

legend is clouded with exaggerations and falsehoods. This much we know: it was Johnny Mayhem more than any other man in the early days of galactic expansion who made the peaceful spread of human civilization from Earth across the distant star-trails to Ophiuchus and beyond a possibil-



The crashing bolt of energy
never reached its mark!

ity. It was Mayhem alone, brave, unrewarded, misunderstood, who often stood between the frail new colonies and the spectre of interstellar war.

Mayhem's real name, his early life, the motivation behind his strange dedication—all are clouded in enigma. He came to be called Johnny Mayhem because mayhem is a word signifying violence and death in the old English language of the planet Earth. Often, however, he was called Mayhem's Brother because he constantly made his appearance in a different guise. There is no doubt, though, that Johnny Mayhem was one man. . . .

—from *THE MAN WHO
SAVED THE UNIVERSE*
3d edition 3104AD

I

IT WAS already dark when Johnny Mayhem made his way swiftly across the quadrangle fronting on the glass-walled skyscraper which was Galactic League headquarters on McCoomb, Sirius' fifth planet.

He would be glad to leave McCoomb, he thought. Even as frontier worlds went, it was a bleak, desolate place. He shrugged as he entered the building. It did not matter.

He would go wherever they sent him next.

A small thin McCoombian in the lobby recognized him. All the McCoombians seemed small and thin, for the cold bare world could not nurture more robust individuals. Old Angus McCoomb, as Johnny remembered it, had gone out planet-hunting far in the rear of the mainstream of colonization. The result was the mean little world which bore his name: McCoomb.

The McCoombian in the lobby said, "You're Johnny Mayhem, ain't you? I seen you breaking up the riot over at Center City. I want to shake your hand, sir. I'm for the League, myself."

Johnny shook hands mechanically and kept walking. That was very bad, he thought. He had to hurry. This McCoombian was for the League, but most of them weren't. Not yet. After what had happened at Center City, they would come here looking for him with blood in their eyes. Provided the McCoombian who had recognized him talked. He would. They always did. When you meet a legend face to face, you have to tell people. Johnny smiled bitterly and let the vac-lift whisk him to the top floor of the skyscraper. .

"The League Firstman, please," Johnny told the receptionist. She was a tall blonde good-looking girl who could never have been born on McCoomb. On Anderson, probably. The second Sirian planet.

"He never sees anyone without an appointment, sir." She was careful to be courteous but not subservient, Johnny noticed. The hallmark of the League, spread thin like the Redcoats of ancient Earth tradition. But not spread as thin as Johnny Mayhem. . . .

Now it did not matter. He would never walk out of the Firstman's office. Here in the League Building he could reveal his identity. "I am Johnny Mayhem," he said quietly.

The half dozen McCoombians sitting in the waiting room looked up as if someone had suddenly announced the coming of God—or Satan. "That's different, sir," the blonde girl from Anderson said. The simple announcement of his name had peeled off her poise like a thin veneer. She seemed nervous and awed. Women always reacted that way to Johnny Mayhem. The living, breathing legend. Look but don't touch. It was flattering, but hardly rewarding in any other way.

"You may go right in, sir," the blonde girl said. The six McCoombians stared at him until he went through the archway beyond the receptionist's desk to the door marked AUSTIN HARMODY, *Galactic League Firstman*.

Harmody was a big heavy man with puffy gray smudges under his eyes. Plenty of benzadrine but not enough sleep. As a League Firstman on a backward planet, he would be lucky if he got four hours a day to himself, in brief snatches. He was paid well and not expected to live very long. Johnny Mayhem was paid nothing and whether he was truly alive as other men are alive was a matter scientists have never been able to decide.

Harmody pushed aside a plastic file folder and stared at Johnny over a bridge he made with his big hands. "What do you want?" he said. "I don't recall any appointments for this hour."

"I am Mayhem," Johnny said. "You are to call the Hub at once and tell them I'm here." He looked at his chrono. "I have exactly fifteen more minutes in this body, you can tell them. Then I'll be dead. Tell them my work on McCoomb is finished and I'm ready for a new assignment."

"My God, so you're Mayhem. I never expected to see you in the flesh, and that's a fact."

"You're the only man on McCoomb who can contact the Hub, aren't you? I had to come here."

"Yes, but—" Harmody let the thought drift. "Man, you're younger than I expected."

"I'm neither young nor old. I am what I am at the moment. I don't know what I'll be like—next time."

Harmody scowled his disbelief. "Will you really get into a new body, like a suit of clothes or something?"

"Not quite, my friend. Look. I now have less than fourteen minutes. In less than fourteen minutes, I'll be dead. If the Hub doesn't get a beam on my *elan* when I die, I'm liable to spend the next few years haunting McCoomb without a body. You wouldn't want to take the responsibility, would you?"

Harmody said he would not. He jabbed his thumb into the whorl-reader of the safe behind his desk, waited a moment until the safe slid open. The sub-space radio with its tight beam from McCoomb to the Hub of the Galaxy beyond the star-swarms at Ophi-

uchus, rolled out. He did something with the dials, paused ten seconds while the incredibly powerful sub-space signal probed its way not through the void of space but under it. Then he said, "This is Austin Harmody, Galactic League Firstman on McCoomb, Sirian System, calling the Hub. I have Johnny Mayhem here in my office."

Johnny smiled. Harmody had not asked for identification. No one ever did. There was something about him, about Johnny Mayhem, the living legend. You feared and respected him instinctively. And if he revealed his identity, you believed him.

The radio voice squawked back: "Man, we haven't left this radio in hours. We were going to call you. What happened there on McCoomb?"

Austin Harmody related how Johnny had broken up the riots at Center City and forced the McCoombian president to sign his renewal of agreement with the League.

"Nine minutes," Johnny said.

Harmody looked at him and turned pale. "My God, Mayhem, I don't want to be responsible. You take the radio, will you?"

Johnny nodded and picked up the small mike. "This is

Mayhem," he said. "What's up?"

"We've got one for you, Johnny. A big one."

"Aren't they all?"

"No. A real big one. You won't like it."

"Eight minutes," said Johnny. "Do you have a beam on me?"

"Don't worry, pal. We won't let that *elan* of yours get away. We're sending the beam out now."

Johnny had never seen the people at the Hub, but he liked them. The Mayhem legend awed them less than it awed most people, perhaps because the only contact they ever had with him was by radio. "Where are you sending me?" Johnny asked.

"You're going to hate our guts, pal."

"I'm listening."

"We've got one on Earth, Johnny."

"Earth? You're kidding."

"New York, Earth. We'll phase you in when you transmigrate. I'm sorry, Johnny, but you're the only one who can handle it."

"You know I said any place but Earth. That was the deal I made."

"Yes. You can always refuse. Hey, we've got you on our beam now. It's all right to drop dead."

"Thanks a lot. The beam is rigged so I go to Earth?"

"That's right, pal."

"Which gives me about six minutes to make up my mind. All right. Hold on and I'll let you know."

Austin Harmody was sitting like a man in a dream, trying to remember every word. In his own right he was an important functionary of the Galactic League, a planetary Firstman. But now he was becoming part—a minute part—of a legend. He said, "I want to remember everything."

"You won't like it," Johnny said. "You won't like the end. I'm going to die here."

"As long as I've seen you, I'm satisfied."

"Harmody, what would you do if they wanted to send you to the one place in the Galaxy where everyone hates you before you even get there?" Except for one girl, he thought but did not say aloud, who loves you. But it's too late for that now, because she's married. It's always too late. You couldn't expect her to wait for a dead man.

"Are you serious, Johnny Mayhem? You really want my opinion?"

"No. I guess I was thinking out loud."

"Four minutes," the radio voice said.

Just then, Harmody's office intercom buzzed. Johnny recognized the voice of the tall blonde girl from Anderson. "Mr. Harmody, sir. There's trouble. A delegation of McCoomb-firsters. Someone told them Johnny Mayhem was here. They said they're going to kick Johnny Mayhem off their planet or cut him to pieces or both. What shall I do? I can't keep them out here much longer."

"Send for the police!" Austin Harmody cried.

"Hold it," Johnny said. "Don't send for the police. My work is done here, Harmody. Sure, the McCoombians hate me. They're chauvinistic like any other planetary people. They can't help hating me after what happened. Listen to me, Harmody. Listen and do what I tell you. It's the final touch. It ought to give you a fifty year headstart as Galactic Firstman among the McCoombians. Do you have guts, Harmody?"

"I—I don't know."

"Let the McCoombian delegation in. I'll threaten you. I'll start yelling something, it doesn't matter what. Do you have some kind of a weapon?"

"Yes, but—"

"Good. I'll strike you. I

want you to shoot me, Harmody. *I want you to kill me.*"

Harmody swallowed hard. "Oh, I couldn't do anything like that. Oh, no. Oh, no sir. No, really. No, sir. No."

"You fool!" Johnny Mayhem shouted. "Get control of yourself. Don't you realize I'm going to die anyway? In a little more than two minutes. You heard me talking with the people at the Hub, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I couldn't kill you."

"Where is it? Your gun?"

The Galactic Firstman reached into a drawer of his desk and took out a nerve blaster. He held it on the flat of his hand and looked at it doubtfully.

"See?" Johnny said. "It's a nerve blaster. A painless way to die. It severs all the synapses, including the involuntary ones. You just forget to breathe, your heart forgets to beat. What could be simpler?"

"I still can't—"

"A minute and a half," Johnny said. He leaned over the desk and spoke into the intercom: "Miss, send in those McCoombians, please."

Seconds later, the door opened. Harmody watched it, fascinated. His hands were

trembling. That was fine, Johnny thought. It would help convince the McCoombians. They hated Johnny Mayhem. They did not understand that what he'd done was for the good of the Galaxy as a whole. They thought too much of McCoomb, a brash, young, inadequate frontier world. If they joined the Galactic League only reluctantly, that might mean a new flareup at any time. But if they saw the League's number one representative on McCoomb fight with and kill Johnny Mayhem. . . .

"I'm warning you, Harmody," Johnny said as several McCoombians entered the room. "You'll do exactly as I say. You know damn well I don't give a hang for the League. It's me. It's Johnny Mayhem that matters. I want you to call the Hub and give them some trumped-up charge about McCoomb. You understand? If the McCoombians won't do things my way, I want Hub bombers to level every single city on this planet."

Harmody was sweating, but he gave Johnny a little smile which said he finally understood. Johnny said, "If you don't do it, I'll radio the Hub myself." He went around behind the desk and pretended

to adjust the controls of the sub-space radio.

"Don't let him, Mr. Harmody," the leader of the McCoombians bleated.

"Keep away from that radio, Mayhem," Harmody said in a grim voice. "I can't let you do anything like that."

Johnny looked at his chrono. He had seconds only. "Try and stop me," he said. Harmody swore at him very convincingly and began to grapple with him. Johnny struck the Firstman hard enough to knock him down. Harmody got up grimly with the nerve blaster in his hand.

"This is Johnny Mayhem on McCoomb," Johnny said into the microphone. "I want you to—"

"You've got to stop him, Mr. Harmody," the leader of the McCoombians pleaded.

Austin Harmody shuddered and fired the nerve blaster at Johnny's face.

Johnny's last thought before he died was that he hadn't made any decision about Earth. Which meant that was where they were sending him.

II

IT WAS like coming up from a deep, deep sleep. There were infinities of dark cold space and layers of fog and

mist to climb through. He no longer remembered how many transmigrations he had gone through in the five years since he had become Johnny Mayhem. Fifty? A hundred? He could figure it out roughly, for it was impossible for him to inhabit any body for more than a month. Some day he might tell someone about that. It was part of the Johnny Mayhem legend and they made wild guesses about it but never knew the real answer. It was the reason for everything. It explained why Johnny Mayhem was. It explained why he could never give up this life. He laughed grimly. This dedicated life. Did he have any choice? This multitude of lives.

He stood up and walked across the bare floor to the mirror. They always provided a mirror. They couldn't understand, as he could, that the body wasn't important to him. If it functioned, if it was healthy and reasonably strong, it would be satisfactory. Indifferently, he looked at his reflection in the mirror.

And felt his heart pound wildly.

He was staring at himself, five years ago.

At Johnny Marlow who had died the most unique death in

the history of mankind and had become Johnny Mayhem.

He got over his first shock and told himself it made no difference. Of course it would be the Johnny Marlow body on Earth. Why shouldn't it be the Johnny Marlow body? His own body, and he could even think about it in the third person. He was doing fine. When he became Johnny Mayhem, five years ago, they put his Johnny Marlow body in cold storage. If you ever return to Earth, they said, and laughed. They never thought he would return to Earth. Like a reincarnated Judas visiting Golgotha. At least, that was what they would think.

On every world a body was waiting for him, in cold storage. A dead person, someone who had died in the prime of life. When he came to a particular world on Galactic League business, he used the body. When he left, a new one took its place in cold storage.

Look at you, he thought. You're Johnny Marlow again. On Earth, they think there's a connection. They think Johnny Marlow is Johnny Mayhem, but aren't sure. Now they'll know. Another world, another body. Mayhem's Brother has arrived. Roll in the sidewalks. Keep the kiddies indoors.

Especially on Earth.

For five years ago, Johnny Marlow had assassinated the President of Earth.

They would not understand. They would not believe. He couldn't help that. Nor did it matter. Now he was Johnny Mayhem and his very name was anathema. The President of Earth had to die. He hadn't been the President any longer. He had been an alien sentience inhabiting the President's mind. He had to be destroyed. It was another part of the legend they did not know. Some day, Johnny Mayhem thought. The right person. . . .

As the men at the Hub promised, Johnny had been phased in on the current Earth situation during transmigration. Since Galactic League Headquarters had moved to the Hub five years ago, Earth had harbored bitterness. Now, finally, it was overt. They wanted to withdraw from the League, since the League no longer considered Earth important enough to be its Headquarters. But if Earth with its four billion people withdrew from the Galactic League, the League by that one blow would not only forfeit all its prestige but most of its power. The League would be washed up.

The men at the Hub said it was a big one.

It was the biggest one Johnny Mayhem had ever faced, on the one planet where hatred of Johnny Marlow-Mayhem was most violent, where he could not even walk the streets in the well-remembered body they had provided for him.

Suzanne Chandler frowned at her husband and said, "Are you sure, dear? Are you very sure?"

"You're very beautiful," he said.

"Please answer me."

"Don't bother your head about it, darling. Let me worry about it. I'm the politician in the family."

"It's going to be a close vote, isn't it?"

"Extremely close, Sue."

She nodded, sat up in bed, then stood up and slipped into a dressing gown. She was a tall beautiful woman in her late twenties, with fair skin and hair black as the underside of a raven's wing. She walked toward the door.

"Where are you going, Sue?"

"Oh, I don't know. I can't sleep. Any place. For a walk."

"A young girl like you shouldn't have insomnia."

"It isn't insomnia."

"I know," he said; giving her a smile. "You're in love. You can't sleep because you're in love."

She came over and kissed him quickly, then walked toward the door again. He said, "We've been married six months, but you're still like a newlywed. . . ."

She had to hurry out of there, then. He was her husband and she supposed she loved him, but at that moment she couldn't stand the sound of his voice. You're in love, he had said. With a ghost, she thought bitterly. It has nothing to do with my marriage to Steve Chandler. It was a joke to Steve, though. He always said she was in love when she seemed distant.

Johnny Marlow, where are you now? she thought. Is it true, the things they say? That you died but you didn't die and you're alive now but a different person yet still Johnny Marlow somehow?

Steve is besides the point. I'm glad I married Steve. We'll be happy together. Everybody said it was a good match. This love I still have for you, Johnny, is harmless. You're dead. You don't exist. What they say about Johnny Mayhem couldn't be true. He's not you. He's not one man. He's a lot of people, all using the

same name to build a legend which will help the Galactic League survive.

But she stood for a long time on the roof of her suburban home on Long Island and looked up at the sky. On clear brisk autumn nights like this, with no moon and Orion back in the northern sky, the biggest, brightest constellation, she almost thought she could reach up and draw herself closer to him.

She trembled with the cold. She had never felt this close before, not since that day, five years ago, when Johnny had died.

They had left clothing for him and enough money so he wouldn't have to worry about food and lodging for the month he would be on Earth. One month, maximum. A borrowed body—even his own, even the body of Johnny Marlow—could not survive longer.

When he closed the door of the farmhouse behind him, flames licked up suddenly. He didn't even look back. He was used to it. An abandoned house, employed for the occasion. A dead body, awaiting his *elan* which gave it life. And then a fire, destroying all traces? All traces of what? he thought with grim amusement. Nothing remained in

the house which had not been there before his coming. It was like exorcising demons.

He followed the rutted wagon trail to a two-lane highway, where a car was waiting for him. He climbed in and set the engine on highway-haul and felt contact made between the surface of the highway and the forcefield on which the car rested. He was whisked away to the west.

When his car crested the first low hill and the speedometer indicated a hundred and ten miles per hour, he could see the glow of New York City on the horizon, all brilliant white and pale cold green with flickers and beams of red. He watched cars streak by in the other direction for a while, then rolled back the front seat of his own vehicle and went through a series of gymnastic exercises.

The body responded beautifully. That was important. He had to know how much it was capable of, had to know exactly at what point—if the occasion arose—it would fail him.

Satisfied, he thumbed the whorl-hole of the dashboard safe. Inside he found an M-gun and a card which had printed on it in plain block letters:

WHEN YOU REACH NEW
MY NAME IS MAYHEM

YORK, GO TO 142 GALACTIC
LEAGUE QUADRANGLE. THE
WHORL-HOLE ON THE DOOR
WILL ADMIT YOU.

As soon as he read it, the white card fell to pieces in his hand, became powder, the specks so fine that when he tossed them in air, they all but disappeared as they separated and drifted to the floor of the car.

After McCoomb and other frontier outworlds, New York was spectacular. He found a carton of old-fashioned unscented cigarettes in the car and smoked one, watching the tall bright night-lit buildings streak by as his car slowed automatically to city speed, sixty miles per hour. There were no cross-walks but only overpasses. New York was no longer a rectangular grid city. Except for Galactic League Quadrangle, the streets were laid out in concentric circles, with no connecting roads except at the north and south poles of the circles. At the very center of the city of concentric circles was Galactic League Quadrangle.

Johnny cut the car from highway-haul to manual and heard the faint whine of the engine coming to life. He entered Galactic Quadrangle at

the south end and slipped into the northbound stream of traffic. He wondered where they were going, all these people in their big, flashing cars. He wondered how they would react if they knew Johnny Mayhem was among them.

At 142 Galactic League Quadrangle, he stopped the car. He climbed out, watched the car roll down to the automatic parking niche below the sidewalk. 142 Galactic League Quadrangle was a spherical structure of gleaming blue. Silver letters above the circular doorway proclaimed it to be the Pan-Solar Exposition.

Johnny went up the slide-ramp to the door. A sign told him Exposition hours were nine hundred to eighteen hundred, but since for obvious reasons he wouldn't be wandering about the streets of New York in daylight, someone was probably waiting for him now. He thumbed the whorl-hole and waited.

The round door slid into the gleaming blue wall.

Rough hands grabbed him. Something struck his head.

He got loose from the hands and staggered across the entrance hallway of the Pan-Solar Exposition. There had been no reason for caution, for his arrival on a new planet was always a secret closely

guarded by the very few technicians necessary to prepare the body for him.

"Get him!" somebody cried.

It was almost dark inside the building. A faint red glow marked the fire exits and revealed silhouettes of men converging on him. His head throbbed with pain. He ran toward one of the fire exits but was grabbed again. Strong hands pinned his arms from behind. A voice yelled something. He lashed out with his feet, sent a man spinning away.

Then something struck his face repeatedly and he did not remember when the hands which pinned his arms released them. . . .

"He's coming to."

"Call the Chief of Staff in, then. He'll want to know."

Johnny sat up. Light stabbed at his eyes. He was in a large bare room brightly lit by recessed ceiling tubes. His arms were numb and it took him a few seconds to realize they were manacled behind his back. Half a dozen men stood around him, some pacing nervously, some not moving a muscle, all looking at him.

A door opened. A tall handsome man in the uniform of Earth, maroon and gold with

gleaming black boots, came striding toward him. On each shoulder the soldier wore the circlet of five stars which proclaimed him to be a General of the Army.

"Can you think logically now, Mayhem?" he asked. "Can you listen to me?"

"Do you realize," Johnny bluffed, "that you're violating the covenants of the Galactic League?"

The General smiled at him. "Don't give us that, Mayhem. You know it isn't true and so do we. You're a lone wolf. You work for the League but they won't lift a finger to help you. They can't. You're not part of the official League machinery."

That was true enough. Johnny shrugged and said, "What do you want?"

"No, Johnny Mayhem. What we want isn't important. What do *you* want on Earth?"

Johnny dipped into the knowledge which had been vouchsafed him during transmigration. "Earth wants to withdraw from the Galactic League," he said. "I'm here to prevent that."

The General lit a cigarette and nodded. The cigarette was scented with fenel. "That proves our point, doesn't it?"

he said, "Under the covenants of the League, a member nation can withdraw by a two-thirds vote of its Assembly. The League can't stop us, legally. But the League will fall apart without Earth's membership. So they've sent you to stop us—illegally."

"Is it your customary procedure to imprison an ambassador of the League and—"

"Mayhem. Come off it. You have no legal status. If we killed you now, the League wouldn't lift a finger. The League would probably pretend you never were here. Do you realize you're the one man in the Galaxy who can be murdered without any possibility of consequences for the killer? Legally, you're dead, Mayhem. You're a dead man."

"You wouldn't bother to tell me what I already know if you were going to kill me. Anyhow, I take a lot of killing. Destroy the body I'm in now. So what? I'll come back and—"

"And haunt us? Don't be melodramatic, Mayhem. They have to know in advance of your impending demise, don't they? If they don't, they'll never get a beam on your *elan*. They'll never put you in another body.

"But we don't want to kill you. Not unless you force our

hand. We just want you to get off Earth and stay off."

"How did you know I was coming?" Johnny asked.

The General smiled, putting out his cigarette. "That was easy. We knew they had Johnny Marlow's body in cold storage for you. All we had to do was watch it and rig a counterfeit message in the car for you."

"What have you got against remaining in the League?"

A civilian with the Chief of Staff said, "Astrographically, Earth happens to be in the backwaters of the Galaxy. But culturally, we're the most important planet. The League doesn't see it that way. The League moved its Headquarters, reduced our vote to equality with all the others, abolished the Council of Three—Earth, Centauri and Capella, increased our taxes—" He rambled on, but Johnny was not watching him. Instead, he studied the Chief of Staff's face. The General hardly seemed interested in his assistant's Chauvinistic speech. If he felt as strongly about it as his actions would indicate, his face didn't reveal it.

Johnny's mind raced back five years to another meeting with a high official of Earth. He wasn't Mayhem's Brother

then. Just Johnny Marlow, a promising young career diplomat in the Department of State. But he'd uncovered something. There was talk of oligarchy replacing Earth's traditional democracy. Some brass hats favored it because their headgear would grow larger, others because they approved of the philosophical precepts behind oligarchy, others because a *coup d'etat* would bring them to power. The President of Earth had approved of oligarchy without apparent reason.

He had always been a democrat, Johnny remembered, a champion of the common man, a believer in Earth's traditional republican form of government. Abruptly, he had changed. He gave no reasons.

He had been possessed.

Johnny had never even learned the alien's name. But somehow, he had come to Earth not physically but in sentience. And somehow, he had inhabited the mind of the President. This had been the driving force behind the oligarchical movement. Without him, it would collapse. It would have no reason for being. And no one believed Johnny.

He did the only thing he could do under the circumstances. He assassinated the

President, hoping to destroy the alien as well. In the next five years, he never learned if the alien had perished with the Earth-body it inhabited. For Johnny Marlow had fled to Canopus and Deneb and the great red star Antares, and fled beyond to the Sagittarian swarm, where stellar distances are more nearly planetary and where he thought his grim pursuers might lose him.

They had found him, though, on the planet of a triple-star system. He was wounded mortally, but managed to crawl off into the dank jungle where the pre-human inhabitants of the planet, the *Knurr*, found him. There, with science unknown to mankind, with an ancient wisdom which had been lost with the ages, for the *Knurr* were an old people already beyond their flowering when Earthmen still wore rude skins, the *Knurr* saved Johnny's life.

For a long time the Galaxy was unaware of this. Johnny's body was found, taken back to Earth, exhibited to the people who had adored their slain President, unaware of what had taken possession of his mind.

And slowly, Johnny was healed among the *Knurr*. In a dead man's body. In the early

days, the knowledge of how he must spend his life—of how he must spend all eternity—almost drove him mad. His sentience, his *elan*, would not grow old. Only bodies grew old. But the electromagnetic makeup of a man's sentience is such that it cannot occupy a body other than its own for more than an Earth month without destroying the body. Thus Johnny Marlow—Johnny Mayhem, as he came to be called—was barred from all phases of normal human existence.

He could still remember the works of the old *Knurr* doctor there in the steaming jungles of the *Knurr's* native planet. "You must learn to live with this thing which has happened to you, Johnny. You are not as other men. You cannot partake of their social life in any way, you cannot have a family or friends in the true sense of the term or a place where you belong. You cannot even have a home, for it is written you must always be on the move. Always—and forever, because if you do not die a violent death, you will never die.

"But every month, your body must be changed. That is why all the avenues of normal social intercourse are forbidden to you. You will not be

one man, but hundreds. You can grow no roots, Johnny. You must always be a wanderer. The alternative is suicide: for, whenever you wish, you may forgo the monthly transmigration."

But Johnny, who was young and full of wonder, slowly conquered the horror he had felt. I am not as other men, he had thought five years ago in the *Knurr* jungle. Very well. I can minimize my shortcomings—or make the most of them.

He had decided to make the most of them. He contacted the Galactic League and offered his services. No undertaking would be too dangerous, for he did not fear death. In the performance of duty he could commit crimes for which other men would die, for he was not a man in the legal sense. He was a wandering sentience, a nomad soul. If it meant breaking the law on some planet for the good of the Galaxy as a whole, he would do it. And he would become legend. He had sensed that at the very beginning. One man—Johnny Mayhem. Or a hundred men, all the different Johnny Mayhem's who appeared in all the trouble-spots of the Galaxy.

Now, in the Pan-Solar Exposition Building on Earth, he

was staring at the Chief of Staff of Earth's armed forces, and wondering. The man's indifference to a cause which he seemed to espouse so fervently reminded Johnny of another man, five years ago. Reminded him of the President, whose mind had been occupied by an alien sentience bent on conquest. . . .

"I'm not leaving Earth," Johnny said. "I intend to go ahead with my plans."

"Which are?" the Chief of Staff asked.

"To make Earth remain inside the League."

"We offer you freedom if you agree never to return here," the General said.

"And you also said you didn't want to kill me."

"Would you prefer confinement?" the General asked. "Say, for one month. I understand that you die in that amount of time, unless your mind inhabits another body. Besides, Johnny Mayhem, doesn't this particular body have sentimental value for you? It was your—uh, original self, wasn't it?"

"No comment," Johnny said.

"Take him to our Antarctic base," the General said. "Keep him there one month—unless he changes his mind."

Two men helped Johnny to

his feet, led him still manacled, toward the door. He turned around and said: "General, I'd like to ask you one question."

"All right, Mayhem."

"Why did it take you five years to possess another Earth mind—*alien*?"

There was a silence in the room after that. Johnny studied the Chief of Staff's face for any change in expression. There wasn't any, but the General said:

"You see? I predicted it. He's Johnny Marlow. He's still insane, as he was five years ago. First the President, whom he killed. Now me. You gentlemen wanted to spare his life. I was willing to go along with that because you said Johnny Mayhem, although hated, was doing great things for the Galaxy. But now you see we have no choice, don't you?"

"Yes," someone said.

Other voices agreed.

The Chief of Staff said, "Very well. He makes no other alternative possible. Take Johnny Mayhem out of the city and kill him."

III

IT WAS very dark outside on the street. A stiff wind blew across the the quadran-

gle, rattling the dying foliage of the autumn trees. As he was forced at gun-point into the car, Johnny wondered if a legend would end here on Earth this night. Five years of it. A living legend. And now, death.

They drove silently. No one spoke. The tall buildings of the city's center faded behind them, to be replaced by the suburban parks and garden apartments, then the outlying factories.

"Would you like a cigarette, Johnny Mayhem?" someone said.

He nodded. A cigarette was thrust between his lips. He inhaled deeply, trying not to think of anything. If he had any chance at all, he must find it within the next few minutes. He must unencumber his mind. If an opportunity presented itself, he must grasp it quickly, decisively. It had always been that way. It was the way of a lone wolf. If he lived, it would go on being his way, all the years of his life.

The car rolled smoothly to a stop as they took it off highway-haul. Distantly, Johnny could see the blazing lights of the city. New York. Somewhere back there, he thought, was a woman. Suzanne. Married now, because Johnny

Marlow was dead. Sleeping in the arms of her husband, secure, not knowing that Johnny Marlow was here, on Earth, in New York. Not knowing he was alive at all. . . .

But he must not think of that. His mind must remain open, ready to grasp—anything.

"Get out of the car, Mayhem."

He was prodded to his feet. He stepped outside. A cold drizzle had begun to fall. He wondered which one of them had the gun, which one would be his executioner.

They all walked away from the car, along the side of a steep gully. Johnny could not see beyond the rim. The gully might be a few feet deep or might drop a hundred feet or more. A low guard-rail stood between it and the road. Cars flashed by on highway-haul.

"That's far enough, Mayhem. Turn around, please. This isn't pleasant for us. Have you anything to say?"

Johnny kept walking slowly, as if he had not heard them. He was on the lip of the gully now. The guard-rail reached a few inches above his knees.

"Stop walking, Mayhem!"

"Sorry, I didn't hear you. No, I have nothing to say."

He heard the rasp of metal

against metal. Whoever held the weapon was checking the magazine to make sure the first shot would be fatal.

"You won't feel it, Mayhem. I'm going to walk up behind you and hold the blaster at the back of your neck. Would you like to pray?"

Instead of answering, Johnny suddenly vaulted the low guard-rail. His movements were awkward, for his hands were still manacled behind him. He felt solid footing under him for two steps and then pitched forward.

A voice yelled: "I can't see him! He's down there somewhere."

He heard the blaster's roar, felt searing energy streak by, inches from his head. Then he was tumbling over and over, rock scraping his face, soft earth getting in his mouth and choking him. He plunged head-first over a final ledge and managed to swing heels down in midair. It was his one hope, for he could not cushion the fall with his manacled arms, both of which now felt numb. He wondered if they were broken.

"Give me that gun, you fool. He's going to get away."

The voice was fainter now, far above him. He seemed to be suspended in space but knew he was falling. He hit

feet first and felt water engulf his legs, his body, his head.

Down he went, kicking for buoyancy with his legs. The river was unexpectedly deep and very cold. He rose back toward the surface slowly, his heavy clothing holding him down. His chest began to ache with the need for air. After sufficient time, the muscles were involuntary. If he didn't get air soon, he would breathe water.

He gasped—and breathed air. He filled his lungs with it and for a moment that was all that mattered.

"There he is. I hear him."

The blaster boiled water a dozen yards from where Johnny was floating on his back. He let himself drift with the current, although this brought him within yards of where the blaster struck. The water suddenly became uncomfortably warm, then hot. Then, ten yards away, it was cold again. The blaster roared and struck harmlessly twenty-five yards upstream.

"We'd better get down there," someone said. The voice was shouting, but faint and faraway.

He began to kick with his legs as strength returned. He was moving rapidly down-

stream now. His body ached in many places, but he began to feel life in his arms again. He was in one piece, more or less, and he was alive. It was more than he could have hoped for.

When strength had returned to both arms again, he tried to tug them apart. The handcuffs might have been damaged, he thought, in his fall.

His hands came apart suddenly. After all, it was much simpler. He turned over on his belly and swam in a slow steady sidestroke downstream. He was still swimming tirelessly when the first faint light of dawn seeped down into the river gorge. He was over in Jersey somewhere.

He knew exactly what they would do. They wanted him, dead or alive. The Chief of Staff wanted him. Because he had guessed the truth. He had sensed it. The nameless alien, the bodiless sentience which attempted conquest in the body of the President of Earth but failed, had returned to try again. Johnny Mayhem must die for that knowledge, but the people of Earth couldn't be expected to stop whatever they were doing and hunt for Johnny Mayhem, the living legend. There were

many places he could hide—on a planet of four billion people. He could lose himself in New York with its millions.

The people of Earth *would* drop everything, though, if it were not Johnny Mayhem, the fugitive, but Johnny Marlow, the assassin.

He saw the headlines in the first town he reached after he had let his clothing dry out in the sun. It said: ASSASSIN MARLOW RETURNS TO LIFE.

People were looking at him. He ran.

"Drink?" Steve Chandler asked his wife.

"No," Suzanne said. "I'm not thirsty, really."

"Before dinner, you usually have a cocktail. You knew him, didn't you, Sue?"

"Yes, I knew Johnny Marlow. We were going to be married."

"Oh. Oh, I see."

"No, you don't. I'm sorry, Steve. I can't help acting like this. I'm afraid they'll get him. I'm afraid they won't. I don't know what I want to happen."

"Does it make any difference to us, Sue?"

"No. Why should it? I'm your wife. You've been good to me."

"I love you, Sue. Can you still say—you love me?"

She didn't answer for a time. She thought, Don't ask me that, please. I don't know. I don't know. Johnny's here, on Earth. A fugitive. Long ago, in a different life, it seemed, he once showed me a place, right here in the city, where a man could hide for years if he wanted to. I know he's there now. I know he is. I ought to go there and help him. He may be starving. He needs someone. He needs me. I believed in him then. I believe in him now. I can't understand all this, who he really is or where he's been or how and why he's returned. But it's Johnny. Here in New York. . . .

"Can you say you love me, Sue?"

"I can't think of that now. I only know that you and Johnny stood for different things. Johnny—for the Galaxy and the brotherhood of man. He died for it."

"He's alive."

"They say he's alive. And you, Steve? What do you stand for?"

"I believe in the greatness of Earth, mankind's birthplace. I don't believe we should be regarded by the League as any fourth-rate planet. I believe if they feel that way we should withdraw from the League."

"But the greatness of Earth and the greatness of mankind spreading across the Galaxy can be equated. Can't you see that?"

"You sound like the speeches of Marlow's I used to read."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I need time to think, Steve. I'm going out."

"We haven't even had dinner yet."

"I've dialed for it. It will be here in a moment. I can't eat now. Not now, never now, while he's cold and starving out there, waiting for someone who can help him."

"I'm the politician in the family," Steve said. He always said that. He was a member of the Assembly from New York. At first that clipped precise sentence had made her furious, but she had grown accustomed to it. Now, though, it was different. Now she said:

"What do you mean by that?"

"You shouldn't let politics come between us, that's all. Why worry your head about politics?"

"You call yourself a politician. The whole lot of you don't amount to anything—without the General. You know that, don't you? General Shelton has all the votes in his

breast pocket. You're nothing but a bunch of proxies."

"Sue, please—"

"Well, it's the truth, isn't it? Proxies for a power-mad would-be dictator."

"Sue, I won't listen to you talking like that."

"You don't have to. I'm going now."

"Sue, I don't want you to leave this house."

She opened the door, biting her lip to keep it from trembling. "I just need time to think," she said. She did not know if she would go to Johnny or not. But she had to find out what was in her own soul.

"If you leave here tonight, I—"

"You'll what. Please, Steve. No theatrics. I haven't said I don't love you. I haven't said I'm sorry I married you. I haven't even said I'm leaving you. I'm just going out for tonight, that's all. Would you like us to still try and make a go of it?"

"Yes," Steve said. He looked amazed. Probably, she thought, he had never doubted their making a go of it for a moment. "Yes, Sue. My God, yes."

"Then goodnight." She turned and looked at him. "Well?"

"When will I see you again, Sue?"

"I don't know." And she closed the door behind her.

Three times on the street he had been recognized. Once it had been dangerous, for a mob had come together quickly. It had lacked organization, however, and he had been able to get away. Now, in the Sperry Crater on the outskirts of the city, about a mile from the Nassau County border, he was waiting. Nights, he went across the border to the small truck farms in Nassau and stole his food. By day he hid in the crater, a grim mile-wide monument of Earth's final world war before world government had come. Once this place had been a planet-wide shrine, but those days were over because war on the scale of a single planet was now impossible. He shook his head bleakly. If Earth dropped out of the League, interstellar war might result from the chaos which followed.

Now a cold night mist rolled in over the low Long Island terrain, evoking memories for him. In the old days he would come here with Suzanne. When the nights were clear they would look up at the stars from the Sperry Crater and because its walls were high and steep the darkness

was greater and the stars brighter. Or, if the nights were mist-shrouded, as this night was, they would huddle together on the edge of the crater with music drifting to them softly from their car and wonder that such a place could exist in a crowded city like New York and yet seem so deserted, so isolated from all the world.

Once, jokingly, Johnny had said that a fugitive could hide here—never dreaming that some day he would be that fugitive, trembling in the chill mist, hungry, wondering if the Johnny Mayhem legend would end here where the last bomb of the last world war fell.

He stood up and began to walk. He was trembling with the cold. They were looking for Johnny Marlow now. Every telecast carried his picture and the picture of the beloved President whom he had slain. They did not understand, and they hated him.

He began to climb the wall of the crater. It seemed unscaleable, but long ago he and Suzanne had discovered a path which twisted and climbed up its steep side.

Suddenly, at the lip of the crater, he stopped. The amber foglight of a car swung toward him off the highway. He

heard the car's engine growl to life as it was taken off highway-haul. He crouched there at the edge of the crater and waited. Somehow, they might have known he had come here. Perhaps Suzanne had fallen victim to the five years of propaganda. They had called him the modern Judas. In five years they had begun to equate the memory of Johnny Marlow with the legend of Johnny Mayhem. A few key people knew that Johnny Mayhem was no mad-dog killer, but to the Galaxy at large he was more often outlaw and pariah than champion of mankind's climb to the stars and beyond.

The car stopped fifty yards away. He saw a figure climb out and walk slowly, uncertainly, toward the crater. His hand closed on a large jagged rock. He sucked in his breath and held it.

"Johnny?"

At first he did not believe what his ears told him. Her voice. Suzanne's.

"Johnny? You're in there, aren't you? Johnny?"

"Suzanne," he said. "Suzanne."

And then, a moment later, she was in his arms, sobbing against his shoulder, her slim body shaking with sobs.

"Johnny, I knew you would come here. I thought you would remember. I read the things they said about you, but I didn't believe them. I didn't, not for one minute. Johnny, are you all right? It's so dark, I can hardly see you. Johnny, do you still look the same? Five years is a long time. Johnny, do you know that I—I'm married? I couldn't help it, Johnny. They said you were dead. I had to lead a normal life, they said. I couldn't live on a memory. I couldn't stay in love with a memory."

"No," he said. "Of course you couldn't. You did the right thing, Suzanne."

"Are you really Johnny Mayhem? That's what they're saying but I don't know what to believe. Some people claim Johnny Mayhem is hundreds of different people, all using the same name. No one understands."

"I am Johnny Mayhem," he said.

"Why did you come here to Earth? You know how they hate you."

"Because I had to come. I won't stay, Sue. When my work is finished, I'll leave."

"I want to go with you, Johnny. Wherever you go. Whatever you do. I don't care what."

He stroked her hair. He brushed his lips on her cheek and then drew back, grasping her elbows gently at arm's length. "No," he said. "That isn't possible. I can't explain why. It's a part of the Johnny Mayhem legend which must remain a mystery as long as Johnny Mayhem is needed, anywhere in the Galaxy. It would be impossible for you to come with me."

She bit her lip. In the mist halo'd moonlight, he could see she was crying. "Then you never should have come back to Earth. It wasn't so bad when I had your memory. Everyone said you were dead. But now I know. . . ."

"Look," he said softly. "They may kill me, but it was worth the risk coming here—just to see you."

She came to him again and kissed him. He held her a long time that way. The five long aching years melted slowly away in their embrace. It's all right, he thought. She's married, but it's all right. Touch her now, hold her now, breathe the fragrance of her, for when you leave Earth you'll never see her again.

And all at once, light glowed all around them.

Blinded, Johnny dropped to the ground, pulling Suzanne

with him. A voice called through the darkness: "You fool, don't shoot! She's with him."

Suzanne sucked in her breath and whispered, "That's Steve's voice. My husband. He must have known I was going to you. He called for help and followed me here. I didn't know, Johnny. I didn't know he was——"

"Shh. Don't talk. Don't let them hear you. Let them come closer. They're armed and I'm not. If they come close enough, there's a chance. If I can surprise them and reach their car——"

He hefted the large jagged rock again. It would make a good weapon, but could not be wielded delicately. Any blow was likely to be fatal.

"But my husband. You'll—you'll kill him."

He smiled at her grimly. He couldn't help it. That was part of the legend too. Johnny Mayhem, who wasn't quite human. Johnny Mayhem, who smiled when he killed. "There is only one Johnny Mayhem," he said. "There can be no other." He whispered in her ear. He hoped she could hear. "That's why, Suzanne. That's why sometimes I have to kill. I built this legend or it was built around me, but now it exists. It has to go on existing

because the Galaxy depends on it."

They were coming closer now. He could hear their brittle footsteps on the glazed rock near the crater's rim. She whispered, "You know, Johnny, I read a book about you once. About Johnny Mayhem. *The Living Legend*, it was called. It said epic poetry was written in times of strife, when people were migrating to new harsh lands and beginning civilization anew. Homer wrote when the Greeks moved into Hellas, *Beowulf* was sung when the Saxons took their ancient island from the Celts. It said you're an epic, Johnny. It said some day an epic song will be written of Johnny Mayhem, who led his people on the pathway to the stars. It said whatever you do now, whatever crime you commit, isn't important. It said stubborn people, foolish selfish unseeing people would never understand what made you so necessary. Nor would proud people. It said our colonization of the starworlds is a humble thing if a great one, for with it we realize the immensity of the universe and our own insignificance. And it said, whenever someone lost sight of that and got so big that he could not longer live

in equality with his fellows or humbly among the stars, that was when Johnny Mayhem was needed.

"I—I'm telling you this, Johnny, because I want you to know I understand. Whatever you have to do, I'll understand. I'll help you. Just tell me what and I'll do it."

"Wait," he whispered. "Don't move. Call to them, if you want. Tell them I'm with you. They won't fire at you. I'm going to crawl around them and get to the car if I can."

She pressed a key into his hands. He flattened himself on the ground and began working his way along on his stomach. She said, "Here I am, Steve. I'm over here—" and let her voice trail off as if he had cupped a hand over her mouth. "He's armed, Steve. Be careful, he's—"

She wasn't doing it only for him, Johnny thought. If she were, he would not have let her. But she understood something of the Johnny Mayhem legend. She was doing it for Johnny Mayhem.

It took him fifteen minutes to crawl the two hundred yards to the car. And when he reached the edge of the highway he saw there was not one but two vehicles there. He

stood up, stretching his cramped muscles.

Two hundred yards behind him, a voice shouted, "What kind of trick is this? You're alone. He's not with you." There was a moment of silence, then the shouting voice was even louder. "Hey, George! He's probably heading for the cars. Watch out, George."

A figure suddenly appeared in front of Johnny. He had no time to think, for the man saw him at once. He dropped to the ground instinctively, groped around and found another stone. He leaped to one side as the man yelled and fired a blaster. He felt its searing heat inches from his face and pounced at the man before he could fire again. Footsteps were pounding across the glazed rock toward them. He had seconds only.

He swung the jagged stone high over his head and brought it down hard. Johnny Mayhem, the mad-dog killer, striking again. He couldn't help it. He hoped the blow wouldn't kill the man, but couldn't be sure. The man fell at his feet without a sound.

Figures were just appearing in the mist when Johnny Mayhem got Suzanne's car on highway-haul and sped back toward the center of the city.

IV

IT WAS on all the telecasts. Fugitive assassin strikes again. They did not attempt to explain how Johnny Marlow could still be alive. He was here. He was alive. Last night he had killed a man named George Cready, out near the Sperry Crater in Queens. All citizens were alerted. No one knew what he might do next.

George Cready, the telecasts said, was an administrative assistant to Assemblyman Stephen Chandler. Early last evening, the Assemblyman regarded his wife's actions as suspicious. She had known Johnny Marlow five years ago. It was possible she knew where he was now. Chandler had followed her, with three assistants, all armed, and one policeman. Mrs. Chandler had betrayed them. Mrs. Chandler, the telecasts said, was now under observation in her home by a famous psychiatrist. As yet, no charges had been made against her.

Johnny had rented a room in a flea-bag boarding house in Brooklyn. He remained in his room all day and watched the telecasts. The room-clerk was a near-sighted old fellow who had not looked closely at his face. Johnny smiled with-

out humor, wondering what the old man would think if he knew Mayhem's Brother was here in his house.

The other item of importance on the telecasts was about General Shelton, the Chief of Staff of Earth's Armed Forces. His figure, resplendent in maroon and gold, appeared constantly on the video screen. He was a handsome man of middle age with strong craggy features and a winning smile. He spoke briefly of the plan to withdraw Earth from the Galactic League. He claimed that he had mustered sufficient strength in Earth's representative Assembly to pass his measure. What was more, he would put it to the test this very day, at the meeting of the Assembly in New York.

An announcer then gave a short biographical sketch of the General. Born in Council Bluffs, Iowa. West Point on the Moon. Figured prominently as a regimental commander in the final world war, twenty years ago. Made a name for himself exploring the Galaxy. Ship-wrecked and lost for five years out in the distant star swarms at Ophiuchus, half-way across the Galaxy.

That was it, thought Johnny. The President had also been lost in space for a num-

ber of years—in Ophiuchus! It was amazing no one noticed the connection. The President's brain had somehow been occupied by an alien sentience. And now—the General.

Instinctively, Johnny knew it. There was nothing he could prove but this was far more important than the possibility of any legal proof. The aliens—whatever they were—did not want mankind advancing unchecked across the Galaxy. They were lurking out in Ophiuchus somewhere. Waiting. Numerically, perhaps, they were not strong. They never made themselves known. But somehow, for some reason, they feared mankind's swift expansion in space.

Now, with General Shelton as a tool, they would strip the Galactic League of its most important member. For, without Earth, the League would quickly disintegrate into countless petty, warring factions. Without Earth's strength to bolster the League, interstellar colonization would probably be checked, would fall in on itself through inertia.

I'll be there, Johnny thought. At the Assembly meeting in the old U. N. Building. It's strange, he mused, the way things work

out for Johnny Mayhem on Earth. This is where his career started—with violence. On other worlds, it's different. Often, intrigue will decide an issue, with Johnny Mayhem fighting for his life in the subtle maelstrom of frontier world politics. But on Earth, nothing was subtle. He had assassinated the President and became a pariah. Now, five years later, he would assassinate Earth's most popular figure, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

For he had to kill General Shelton. The man was a hero, a paragon. He could say or do no wrong. Without him the movement to withdraw Earth from the League would collapse. He would not even be a martyr, for his living strength and popularity were necessary to cement the factions of an isolated Earth together.

Johnny Mayhem, the mad-dog killer. It had come to that again. And then, in the wild confusion which followed, he must somehow clear things up for Suzanne.

Provided he was alive to do it.

There was a festive air about the old U. N. Building. Bands played. Speeches were made. The Galactic League's banner, the famous silver star on a black background, had

already been lowered. In its place was the white globe of Earth on a blue background, the old U. N. emblem.

Crowds swarmed the streets outside U. N. Park. Among the hundreds of thousands who came to be on hand for the historic occasion was a young man noteworthy only for his complete lack of hair, drawn gaunt face and extremely white skin.

This was Johnny Mayhem, his head shorn, his skin whitened with pigments, his facial structure altered by injection. He did not think he would be recognized. Noticed, yes. Commented on, probably. That was the idea, for if people commented on his baldness and albino lack of coloring and fleshless face, they would not see in him Johnny Mayhem.

He got as far as the main entrance to the building, and was stopped there. A guard said, "Sorry, folks, we're all full up. You can watch the proceedings on the video screen outside in the park. It's a fifty-footer."

He walked swiftly to the other side of the park, took a taxi from there to the underground vehicular entrance of the U. N. Building. A guard flagged them down. "Not a chance, friend," he said.

"We've been full since this morning." But the guard looked in at Johnny eagerly. Johnny could almost read his mind: queer-looking fellow. From one of the outworlds, probably. Hell, he might even be an ambassador of some kind. I'd better be polite.

Johnny said, "I'm the unofficial representative of Fomalhaut IV."

"Unofficial, eh? Of course, we always have room for ambassadors, with or without plenipotentiary powers. Have you any identification?"

Johnny said, "Look at me."

"Yeah, but—"

"Fellow, I'd like to have your badge number and your name. This sort of rank insolence—"

"All right. All right. I'm only trying to do my job. Go ahead. Aisle five if you're not plenipotentiary. We got to be careful, see? Earlier today, someone broke in here. A madwoman, they said. Maybe you heard about her on the telecasts? Suzanne Chandler. She used to know that Mayhem's Brother guy, they say. She probably figures he's going to be here and wants to be on hand to help him. They think she's crazy."

"She broke in, you say?"

"Yeah. Hiding in there somewhere now. They can't

stop the proceedings to find her. They can only hope she doesn't try anything violent."

"And they say she's mad?"

"Brother, you tell me. They ain't had any report from the brain doc, yet, but last night she helped Johnny Mayhem get away. You tell me if she's crazy or not. She likes the guy."

"I see what you mean,"

Johnny said. He tapped his taxi driver's shoulder, and they rolled down the ramp to aisle five. He paid his fare and watched the taxi slowly return up the ramp. Aisle five was crowded with vehicles but had been full since morning. Except for a single patrolling guard, Johnny could see no one.

Johnny walked up behind the guard, mugged him with quick objective ruthlessness, dragged him between two cars and quickly stripped him. Ten minutes later, Johnny walked briskly and confidently in the direction of the elevators which would take him to the General Assembly of Earth. He was wearing the uniform of an Assembly guard, with a small, fan-nosed blaster dangling at his right hip.

Provincialism had returned to Earth. The General Assembly Hall was a riot of color, of

crisp new native uniforms and dress from all the continents. Such clothing had not been seen in a large city for a hundred years and more, but now it filled the old U. N. Building as national representatives vied with one another to emphasize the importance of their own regions in this decisive, historic break with the League.

General Shelton was already speaking as Johnny entered the room. He walked boldly down the aisle toward the podium and stationed himself at parade rest not ten yards from the Chief of Staff. General Shelton was saying:

"In conclusion, the League has steadfastly refused to grant Earth its rightful place of importance in the Galaxy. Yes, we're one world only and there are larger worlds, worlds rich in natural resources, new virgin worlds with stands of timber bigger than anything Earth has ever seen and vast underground seas of petroleum. But we're the birthplace of humanity and we made all their outworld colonies possible. And from a purely practical point of view, Earth has thirty times the population of any of the outworlds—and the only worthwhile market for their resources.

"Therefore, if we're snubbed, rejected, classed with smaller worlds—yes, and vilified because Earth happens to be the native planet of Johnny Marlow who is Mayhem's Brother—I say to you the Galaxy has given us no choice but to reject its League, cast off its needless shackles, return to our former isolated greatness. . . ."

His eyes, Johnny thought. It's there. The alien. If only they could see. But there isn't time. They'll never believe me. Johnny Mayhem will be hated more than ever on Earth, but—

Johnny raised his blaster suddenly and fired.

And watched the deadly radiance bounce harmlessly off an invisible forcefield as figures converged quickly on him.

V

HE THUMBED the charge button of his blaster to non-lethal and began piling the guards up all around him as the weakening rays fanned out and dropped them. None of the guards dared to use a weapon, for Johnny stood between them and Earth's most important politicians and they did not know how far the forcefield extended.

When a wall of stunned guards separated him, body on body, from the angry, shouting, unbelieving people behind him, Johnny played his blaster, full intensity once more, on the force field. A forcefield was strong but not impenetrable. Thirty seconds of blaster-fire should do it, Johnny thought. But he might as well ask for thirty minutes.

Except that another blaster's searing rays bounced off the forcefield. Amazed, Johnny looked to his left. Suzanne was standing there, half a dozen yards from him, within the circle of stunned guards, a jerking blaster in her hand.

Thirty seconds. And half of that, fifteen. Maybe. Maybe. . . .

Johnny's left arm went numb as a blaster hit it. The guards were firing now. In seconds, they would close in, ringing Johnny and Suzanne with death.

"Give yourself up!" he told her. "You don't have to sacrifice your life. You've done enough. You—"

"I believe in Johnny Mayhem. I don't know why you're doing this, but I trust you. I love you, Johnny. I—"

Things moved in swift kaleidoscopic confusion after that. The forcefield tinkled like breaking glass. The

guards came quickly from all sides of the Assembly. Johnny's blaster bucked in his hand as it no longer met the forcefield's resistance. He saw General Shelton drop behind the podium, to reappear seconds later with his own weapon.

Its first discharge struck Suzanne in the breast. She crumpled with a little sigh and rolled over on her back, the blaster clattering from her hand across the floor. Johnny kneeled beside her, but she was already dead. . . .

He ran recklessly forward, gained the platform on which the podium stood. From somewhere behind him, an energy ray decapitated a man on General Shelton's right. The Chief of Staff fired his own blaster at Johnny once more, then plunged down a passageway behind the podium.

Johnny followed swiftly, blasting two guards to get by. Nothing mattered now. Nothing, not even Johnny Mayhem. Only the slim figure lying dead on the floor in the Assembly, slain by the man he was chasing.

General Shelton whirled suddenly toward him. They fired simultaneously.

Johnny felt nothing as the ray struck his already ruined

left arm. General Shelton looked very startled and then very angry and then very outraged that he lacked the strength to lift his blaster and fire again, lacked the strength to do anything but sink slowly to the floor.

He had only seconds left when Johnny reached him. Johnny could hear voices shouting down the passageway. The General said: "I'm dying, Johnny Mayhem. I suppose you think you've won."

Johnny said nothing.

"You fool. You tried to kill me once. You failed, didn't you? You murdered the President of Earth to do it, and have been a pariah ever since. Now you've killed their most popular hero. I still live, Johnny Mayhem. Fool, fool! Do you think the destruction of this mortal Earth body matters to me? Do you think it mattered last time? Fire again, why don't you? Rip the body to shreds. I won't mind."

Five years ago, Johnny thought. I was a man but you made me a legend. I'm not a man now, I'm a dedication. I'm dedicated to get you, no matter how long it takes, no matter what unplumbed parts of the Galaxy you hide in, no matter what form you take or where you hide or if all the Galaxy is your ally. And when

I get you, finally, it won't be just for Johnny Mayhem and it won't be for mankind. It will be for a slim beautiful girl, who wanted to believe. . . .

"You win for now, Johnny Mayhem. They'll never vote to leave the League with General Shelton dead. There will be talk of doing it, talk of his martyrdom, but without his leadership, they'll not be able to manage. But there will come another time, Johnny Mayhem."

"Yes," Johnny promised, "there'll come a time. Where is it you live, in Ophiuchus or beyond the star swarms there? I'll find you. The Galaxy isn't big enough for you to hide. . . ."

Something filmed the General's eyes. He said, with a rasping alien voice, "I'll await you." Something rattled in his throat. He died.

"There he is!" a guard shouted.

Raw energy struck the dead man's body, flipped it over on its stomach. Johnny plunged ahead, his dead left arm swinging uselessly at his side. He mounted two flights of stairs and reached the top floor of the building, where the Galactic League Firstman had his office.

Johnny plunged past the

(Concluded on page 100)

THE GENIUS

By IVAR JORGENSEN

Once upon a time (not so very long ago considering the age of the Earth) man was little more than the beasts of the jungle. He was frail of body, weak of spirit, quick to age. But he had one thing to distinguish him from all other forms of life: the gift of imagination. So, painfully and at the cost of his blood, he laid the groundwork for the cotton gin, atomic energy—and the Cadillac Eldorado!

ZALU'S time of fear had come. It had been upon him for several seasons now, and as one followed the other, his fear deepened because he knew the moment was coming ever closer when Cabo, his grandson—the Master of the cave—would suddenly seize a club and drive him out.

The driving forth of an old one was as certain as the rising of the sun, but it occurred at no fixed time. In some cases, where the Master of a cave was particularly stupid, an old one could stay around until he — or she — scarcely had the strength to move. Then one day, the Master

would see him raise a bone to his lips and suddenly realize the old one no longer brought in the carcass of Malu the deer or even carried water from the river. Then the Master would rise up and smash his club down on the old one.

Perhaps the old one would not be able to dodge the blow and would die instantly. In that case the body was dragged to the place for dying and left in bleak solitude until animals came to tear away the scant flesh. Sometimes the animals would wait until the old one had expired and sometimes not.

If the Master of a cave was

intelligent and alert, however, an old one had a harder time—was often driven out while still active and healthy, but too weak to stand for long against the beasts that skulked around the dying place in search of food.

Such was Zalu's fear; for Cabo was not only alert and intelligent, he was also mean and selfish. He watched the food jealously and sometimes even his mate and children had it snatched from their mouths.

So Zalu did his level best to be helpful. He ate sparingly and brought water from the river even though he often fell to his knees under the load. He stayed out of Cabo's way as much as possible and cried for the days when he himself had been a great hunter and had brought meat home to his mate and children.

But Cabo could be fooled only so long and one day Zalu made the mistake of reaching for meat when there was but one piece left with Cabo still hungry. Cabo looked up, scowling. His eyes settled on Zalu and the old one knew that his moment had come.

Cabo snarled, "You fill your belly and bring nothing to the cave."

Zalu withdrew his hand. "I

bring water," he said. "I bring much water."

"Water! That is work for the women! You are too old to hunt and bring in food."

"I am not!" Zalu cried, sick at the thought of the dying place and the beasts creeping in belly-down to gnaw at his bones. "In my youth I killed Robu the tiger. I killed him with my club and brought his carcass home to my mate!"

"But you are no longer young and now I have to feed you!"

"I can still kill Robu. I am still a great hunter!"

Cabo was the kind easily thrown into a rage and Zalu's desperate words sounded to him like defiance. With a roar, he seized his club and sprang across the cave.

Zalu howled in terror and sought to escape death at Cabo's hands. He almost succeeded, but his weakened muscles betrayed him. He slipped at the mouth of the cave and fell headlong.

The club of the Cave Master smashed downward toward his skull. Screaming, Zalu tried to roll from under. Again he was a trifle too late. The head of the club snapped the bone of his shoulder and turned his scream of fear into one of pain. He rolled over



Snarling its defiance, the big cat drew back.

and lay helpless, completely exposed to a second blow of the club.

But a whim of the moment turned Cabo from the kill. Heads had popped out of other caves as the dwellers realized an old one was being slain and they crowded over each other to see the kill.

Cabo liked attention and probably felt he could hold it longer by dragging the affair out. This he did by grabbing Zalu's ankles and hauling him down past the caves toward the place of dying. He strode along with his head high as though he had killed meat and was bringing it home. One of the dwellers laughed. Another took it up, then another. Cabo, thinking the sound came from admiration of his act, grinned and threw out his chest and pulled Zalu roughly along with the other dwellers following. When he got to the place of dying, he picked Zalu up, raised the old one over his head and threw him down cruelly on the pile of bones.

Zalu again screamed in pain and Cabo cried, "Stay there and die, useless one! You will make a meal for Robu before the sun sets and rises again!"

With that, he marched off toward the caves with all the dwellers following along be-

hind; laughing at the memory of how Zalu looked being hurled down onto the bones.

So great was Zalu's fear of the dying place, that he expected to experience death immediately. He lay there cringing from the pain, waiting for the end. But the sun passed over the sky and he still breathed and even the pain in his shoulder lessened somewhat.

I am not old, he thought. The old ones who are put here die quickly, but I am still alive and strong. Cabo made a mistake in dragging me here. I am too young to have my bones cracked by Robu's jaws.

If there was only a way I could show Cabo he is wrong. If I could only bring meat to the cave and hear the cries of those who would envy me. Then Cabo would be sorry and give me an honored place at the fire and I could reach for all the meat I could eat.

Zalu lay shivering, thinking thus, and as the sun sank low he heard the growls of Robu skulking at the edge of the burial ground. His terror was pitiful as the snarling continued and the growling smote his ears like the wail of doom sounding for an old one who was too weak to hunt and good for nothing but to die.

The sun went down and the

night grew chill. Zalu shivered and crawled under a pile of bones seeking warmth. But the bones did not stave off the cold and before long his legs and arms were numb. Still the snarling and growling continued and as time passed and Robu did not come for him, Zalu began to wonder.

The great tiger usually came from nowhere and was upon his victim in a flash. But this tiger stayed in the shadows, snarling and growling.

Zalu did not understand this. Was it the dwellers, hiding where he could not see them and making noises like Robu in order to see his fright? He did not think so. They would not stay out in the cold just to laugh at an old one. Then Zalu saw a shadow slink near and was sure his time had come.

But the shadow faded back and growling began again. Until Zalu could stand it no longer and screamed, "All right, Robu! Come and kill me! I am lying here helpless! Come and sink in your great teeth and end this misery for me!"

But Robu did not come and after a while Zalu drifted off into a restless sleep, brought on from sheer exhaustion.

The warmth of a new sun and the pain of his shoulder joined to awaken him. Those things and perhaps something else: Robu! Squatting on his haunches not two arm lengths away, the great tiger bared his fangs and looked at the old one.

Zalu cried out in surprise. Then, in a spilt second, he decided that he was not going to die like an old woman! He would die like a hunter, fighting to the death!

With another cry, he sprang up, in spite of the torture in his shoulder, and seized a rock and hurled it at Robu. It was a far larger rock than any old one could have hurled without the terror of death in his heart, but the terror added strength and the big rock sailed through the air.

Robu snarled anew and tried to dodge, but his front legs slipped and he fell and the rock crashed down on his shoulder—just as the club of Cabo had smashed against Zalu's shoulder at the mouth of the cave.

The tiger tried to arise, but his legs gave under him and now his roars of rage were terrible to hear. But otherwise, he did not act like Robu at all. There was no death lunge, no great dripping jaws, and in spite of the dreadful

tiger screams, Zalu realized something that made him forget even the pain in his shoulder.

Robu was afraid!

With a snarl of his own, Zalu seized up another rock and advanced on the tiger; advanced right into the gaping jaws and brought the rock down with all his strength. He did this again and again until he was too weak to raise the stone; until all the false strength had vanished.

But by that time, Robu lay quiet, his jaws still open, the great teeth still bared; but no longer dangerous, because Robu was dead.

Zalu sank to the ground in a spasm of weakness and pain. He did not feel the pain, though, so great was his happiness and exultation.

He had killed Robu the tiger! He had met the terrible saber-toothed killer in combat and had defeated him!

He — Zalu — was still a mighty hunter.

His joy almost blinded him; it was so bright. Now what would they say at the caves? How they would envy him when they saw him as he really was! A great hunter who had risen up from the place of dying to go forth and slay Robu and bring his carcass to the dwelling place.

Zalu lay back regaining his strength, giggling in happiness at the thought of Cabo's face when he—Zalu—came in with Robu over his shoulders!

He could not wait any longer. He got to his feet and bent down and seized Robu's huge head. It did not rise so much as a finger span from the ground. Zalu tugged and hauled until he was crying from the pain of his broken shoulder. Then he sank to the ground, knowing he could never throw the tiger over his shoulder and carry it in triumph to the caves.

But he *had* to show them. There *had* to be a way. He could not fail after actually having killed the tiger. It was unthinkable.

Zalu laid his face on the ground, and though he knew it not, he was praying.

After a while he opened his eyes and then, a little later, he realized he was looking through a piece of dead tree trunk that had rotted away in the center. This meant nothing, however, until the log rolled away when he leaned against it to arise. He stopped and stared at the log for several minutes and an idea was born in his mind—a solution to his problem. He got to his feet and began

working swiftly, his shoulder forgotten.

He placed the hollow log at one side of Robu's carcass and found another one to place on the opposite side. Then he thrust a stick through each log so that their ends extended beyond the ends of the logs. Now he laid two more sticks in the other direction, so that he had a square with the ends of his second pair of sticks lying on the axles extending from the hollow centers of the two logs.

Now, he got other sticks and pushed them under Robu's carcass. The ends of these he placed on his two cross-bars that lay on the axles of his square wagon and he was able to gradually raise the carcass free of the ground.

Next, trembling with eagerness, he hooked the crotched end of a dead tree branch onto one of the supporting sticks at the front end beneath the tiger's head.

He held his breath and pulled.

The ground was fairly level and had a down-slant toward the caves, and the hollow logs turned as a result of his efforts, the weight of Robu holding the axles in place.

It was not easy work, dragging the rude conveyance to the caves, but Zalu managed

it, much of his strength coming from the anticipation of the envy he would engender among the dwellers.

When he hauled the body through the open space, the dwellers came out one by one to stare. Zalu ignored them, toiling on, waiting for their shout of admiration.

The dwellers were busy staring at the new contrivance upon which an old one could pull the carcass of Robu and there was no sound.

Until Zalu got to Cabo's cave and dropped the forked stick with which he had pulled the wagon. He smiled and waited for Cabo, who had come out of the cave, to invite him in.

But Cabo did no such thing, and at that moment, a shout of laughter went up from the dwellers. This was evidently the funniest thing they had ever seen.

Zalu turned on them in fury. "Be still! I am a great hunter! I have killed Robu and brought his carcass to the cave! Can't you see what I've done?"

Cabo's fury was terrible to see. "You have smashed the head of a sick old dying animal and dragged it to my cave. A child could have done the same. Behold how the carcass smells!"

Zalu turned to stare at the body on Malu. "He was alive! I killed him! He snarled at me!"

"He whined at you. Your feeble ears could not tell the difference! I took you to the place of dying and you come back to shame me, old one!"

And with that, Cabo raised his club and smashed it down on Zalu's head. Striving to regain face with the dwellers, he picked up the bodies of both the tiger and Zalu and threw them over his shoulder. He stood up straight, scowling, and yelled, "I will teach an old one to make me a thing for laughing!" and he strode majestically back to the place of dying and threw both bodies down on the pile of bones.

Then, as if to vent his rage, he picked up a great rock and smashed it down on Zalu's head.

Back at the caves, however, the incident was almost forgotten, all attention being on the strange contraption upon which Zalu had brought in the body of Robu. Several children seized it and pulled it along, laughing at the ease with which it moved. Then the men knocked them away and played with it themselves. While the women hastened away to find other hollow logs upon which to haul several trips of water from the river at a single time.

But Zalu saw none of this.

The inventor of the Wheel was dead.

THE END

MY NAME IS MAYHEM

secretary, called over his shoulder, "Lock the door behind me! I'm Johnny Mayhem."

He told the Firstman to contact the Hub of the Galaxy at once. He waited for the familiar lethargy to overcome him as his *elan* was beamed from the Johnny Marlow body. He had not asked where they were sending him this time. If he lived to be a thousand—which, under the circumstances, was distinctly

(Concluded from page 92)

possible—he would never forget how Suzanne had died because she believed.

How the alien, still unknown except for the bare fact of his existence, had killed her. . . .

It did not matter where the people at the Hub sent him. He would do whatever was expected of him. The Johnny Mayhem legend would grow.

But some day, somewhere, he would meet the alien again.

THE END

THE REVOLVING FAN



AS I HAVE mentioned in a previous column, that group of science fiction fans who read, edit, and/or publish fanzines have developed their own lexicon. One of the most interesting of the terms they have invented is "egoboo." Now, just what is egoboo? As I understand it, it is a task or work performed, an attitude taken, which is designed to augment one's reputation. It is, in other words, ego-boosting.

I am now about to propose another portmanteau word for inclusion in the fans' vocabulary. I developed the word after detecting a tendency in various fanzines—one which I look upon with a far more jaundiced eye than I do upon egoboo. The word is "shlue." It is shlue which makes a faned slip an obscenity into a page which is otherwise blameless; which oft makes him opportunistically take one side of a quarrel (purely verbal, of course) even though that viewpoint is completely against his principles and indeed against his printed ideals. Something drives these devotees of shlue—something which makes them wish to cry "Look! I'm different! I'm surprising!"

For shlue is, of course, the portmanteau word for "shock value." In small (very small) quantities, it is not without its positive effect; in massive, grotesque, or irrational doses it can do nothing but alienate. My advice to fanzine writers, editors, and readers is one which is an axiom to every prozine counterpart—remember your responsibility to your reader. And with this brief admonition, here we go to the latest fanzines at hand:

DIMENSIONS. #15. Aug.-Oct., 1954. Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland, O. 25¢; \$1.25 per year. 86 pp.

The above remarks about shlua should be taken to heart by Mr. Ellison. As a perusal of the pages of his fanzine easily demonstrates, he often uses terms, attitudes, and ideas calculated to produce shlua. One cannot help but admire his industry. Here he has produced an (for fanzines) enormous effort, the sum total of which is to make the reader, upon scanning certain passages, raise a tired eyebrow and say, "Oh, Harlan—not again!" Profusely illustrated, **DIMENSIONS** leads off with a citation given to Phil Farmer, goes on to a fantasy by Ralph Rayburn Phillips (shlua!) which is not without its satiric points, works its way through the editor's many and often contradictory views on life, sex, science fiction, sex, space travel, sex, and the like; has an excellent book review department by Damon Knight, and another by the editor and Andre Norton; a most interesting section devoted to s-f poems and lyrics; a fanzine review column by David Ish; a rational plea for less hijinks and other sophomorisms at conventions, by Dean Grenell; a bad short story by Ray Schaffer, Jr.; the second part of a serial, "Falcons of Nara-bedla," by Marion Zimmer Bradley; and other assorted reports and departments. An uneven, often puerile, often interesting 'zine, about which we can only say, "Quantity does not always make quality."

* * *

PSYCHOTIC. #18: Jan.-Feb. '55. Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland, Oregon. 5/\$1. 29 pp.

Besides its regular departments, "The Leather Couch," "Section Eight," and "The PsychoAnalyst" (the latter, as you may have guessed, the book review section), most of this issue is taken up with still another report of the SF s-f convention. Please, fellas—can't we get off this kick? It's getting so I can tell you what and who each and every one of the participants wore, did, suffered, chuckled at, and got drunk with. Enough!

* * *

INSIDE AND SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER. #8: March, '55. 111 Howard, Tampa, Fla. 5/\$1. 38 pp.

It's always a pleasure to read **INSIDE**, if only for the clear offset job, which makes for easy reading. Lead-off story, "The

Ship," by William F. Nolan and Charles E. Fritch is a clever satire on the type of story written by Ray Bradbury; Joe Gibson attacks the ideological rigidity of scientists and s-f writers; William L. Freeman evaluates "Imagination" with largely unfavorable results, and is answered with rationality by editor Bill Hamling. A column of book reviews, and then an oddity—a short story by Joseph Slotkin, called "Son," which has been influenced by Richard Matheson, but which doesn't make its planned effect; a s-f newsletter, and a column of epistles from fans. Verdict: INSIDE is faltering a bit, but will probably hit its stride again. Nothing serious.

* * *

MERLIN. 1. Jan.-March, '55. Lee Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Indiana. 5¢. 12/50¢. 21 pp.

Miss Tremper, who is rapidly becoming my favorite feminine fane, comes up in this new 'zine (which replaced her PHOBOS) with a short story by T. C. Gaius which is better than most fanefforts. Sundry book reviews and a letters column make up the rest of this unpretentious, charming little 'zine. Definitely worth the price, and more—and when can I meet Miss Tremper?

* * *

MAGNITUDE. 1. Winter, '55. Horizons Enterprises, 409 West Lexington Dr., Glendale, California. 10¢; 6/50¢. 16 pp.

This newest of the fanzines is put out by the Chesley Donovan Science Fantasy Foundation, a group of 17 youngsters in California. They have a nice 'zine, which would have been better looking had their printer not fouled up his offset work. Four short stories prove that these young Californians have a surprisingly professional grasp of short story technique, and, with a poem by Anthony Jason, a column of news by the members, and a department by F. J. Ackerman, make up a fine first effort.

* * *

FRONTIER. #1., Jan. '55. Official Bulletin of the Society for the Advancement of Space Travel. Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. Sent to members. Dues: \$1.50. 14 pp.

While not properly a fanzine, this publication is included in our column because it should be of interest to every fan. It contains excerpts from the Society's Newsletter, the Charter of the organization, a listing of Departments (from Astron-

omy to Flying Saucers to Space Medicine), and Department Heads, and editorial notes by Mr. Smith. Since the Society's avowed aim is "to work for, study about, and put to wise use the achievement of space travel," it's an organization many of us would like to belong to.

* * *

TRIODE. #2. *Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis St., Greatmoor, Stockport, U. K. (U. S. Subs: Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.) 10¢. 46 pp.*

Another visitor from overseas, this legible offering again shows the humor and the commonsense of our British cousins. Walt Willis is present in this issue, as is only natural, in a "Future History of Fandom," which reports with inimitable wit the vicissitudes of a group of fans; Ken Slater, Bert Campbell, and Ted Carnell engage in a Donnybrook on the outlook for science fiction; Tony Thorne gives a tongue-in-cheek report on his experiences with a book club; Dale R. Smith deals with collecting science fiction; Ramsey Carson writes about s-f in Britain; columns by Mal Ashworth, Terry Jeeves, and Mike Wallace; a letters department; and a book review section make up this excellent, profusely illustrated, light-hearted effort.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES. #218. *March, '55. Fandom House, P.O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, N. J. 10¢. 8 pp.*

The newest issue of this excellent, informative newsletter brings us more evidence of the recession in s-f magazine publishing: three prozines merging into one; another not to be revived. Various interesting and newsworthy items, and a special section of book reviews by Bill Blackbeard wind up Mr. Taurasi's and Mr. Van Houten's latest edition.

* * *

FREIDBERG'S MAGAZINE. #1. *Jan.-Feb. '55. Freidberg Pubns., 5369 W. 89th St., Oak Lawn, Ill. 15¢. 21 pp.*

Contents of this mimeographed 'zine, which tries to match the prozines in format and contents, include a poor short story by David H. Keller, M.D.; an article by Michael Maher on the belief, common to most religions, that the psyche lives on after death; an odd story by Elmer H. Kirk which does not come off; and three poems by Gertrude M. Carr. In its ambitious attempt to emulate the prozines, FREIDBERG'S MAGAZINE is outmatched. It needs far better material.



THE books which have reached my desk in the past two months are representative of what the publishers hope will take your fancy. They include three science fiction novels, two anthologies, a collection of s-f short stories, a "factual" book on flying saucers, an extraordinary fantasy, and a group of psychoanalytic tales. For want of space, therefore, I shall have to surrender the critic's privilege of writing his introductory ruminations, and go directly into my reviews:

TIMELINER. *By Charles Eric Maine. 249 pp. Rinehart & Co. \$2.75*

Hugh Macklin, mathematician and physicist, has developed an atomic device based on dimensional quadrature, by which he hopes to travel through time. Deeply in love with his wife, Lydia, he is not aware that she is unfaithful to him, her lover being Macklin's associate in the experiment. Thus, when Macklin volunteers to test the machine, his rival seizes the chance to get rid of Macklin, overloads the device, and kills the physicist. But Macklin, although his body is dead, finds that his psyche has traveled into the future, and has possessed the body of a man of the 21st Century. Once again he finds a girl to love; once again she is like Lydia. Again Macklin dies, to go on with his travels. He visits outer worlds, planets among the stars, finding time and again that there is one factor which runs through his "timelining"—the name future generations give to psycho-temporal parasitism. That factor is his affinity for a woman in the image of his long-dead wife. Macklin's

adventures build in scope and tension until they are resolved in a wry, ironic, and entertaining twist.

Written with that lucidity which seems peculiar to the best British science fiction writers, "Timeliner" would have been a far better book had it not been so cerebral. Despite its emphasis upon emotion as a prime factor in its plot, it is written with an intellectualism which removes the reader from its characters so that coolly, sanely, we watch with interest—but with small identification—the working out of a clever, fascinating exercise in fictional dexterity.

UNDERSEA QUEST. *By Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson. 189 pp. Gnome Press. \$2.50*

Opposite to "Timeliner" (see above), "Undersea Quest" suffers from a plethora of emotion. The puzzled, confused orphan hero, Jim Eden, reports to the great Sub-Sea Academy at the age of sixteen, to become a cadet in Uncle Sam's under-sea navy. He makes a true friend and a villainous enemy; shortly before he is to graduate, he finds himself the victim of a plot which leads to his unjust expulsion from school.

Seeking the key to the puzzling enmity which dogs him, Jim searches for his one remaining relative, Uncle Stewart Eden, who has been reported missing in the deeps near the sub-Pacific city of Marinia. His misfortunes continue interminably, but by truly Algerian (Horatio, that is, not North African) pluck-and-luck Jim wins free to see the confounding of his enemies and the ruination of their plans, finding himself richer than Croesus and reinstated in the submarine Academy.

"Undersea Quest" is as good as it sets out to be—a simple, pleasant juvenile which should give teen-agers an engaging brace of hours away from the television set.

A MAN OBSESSED. *By Alan E. Nourse. 127 pp. Ace Books Inc. Double Book, with Andre Norton's "The Last Planet." Paper: 35¢.*

No book can start, figuratively speaking, with a high-pitched scream and attempt to build from there. The effect is as if we were to start a meal with candy and clotted cream: our appetites are quickly satiated.

In the 21st Century, a gigantic medical megaloctopus, Hoffman Center, is engaged in secret, dangerous experiments on

volunteer human guinea pigs who get enormous bonuses for the risks they take. The novel's protagonist, Jeffrey Meyer, is one of these, for he has followed Paul Conroe, whom he wants to kill, into the only refuge left the hunted man. To get at Conroe, whom he believes to have killed his father, Jeffrey must volunteer for an experiment which may lead to madness and death. On the one hand he faces psychic extinction; on the other, wealth and vengeance.

The twist which Mr. Nourse gives his ending fails of its effect because he does not play fair with the reader. One extremely important fact (which, by critic's ethics, I may not divulge), should have been presented or at least implied from the book's beginning. Instead, the author has hidden it until its revelation is disappointingly anticlimactic. This, in company with the reason with which I began this review, engenders a letdown which is especially exasperating because Mr. Nourse has demonstrated in other stories that, when not pressed into haste and carelessness, he can write much better than this.

The companion volume in this double book is Andre Norton's "The Last Planet," a reprint which was first published in 1953 under the title of "Star Rangers."

ALL ABOUT THE FUTURE, Edited by Martin Greenberg. 374 pp. Gnome Pres. \$3.50

Like most of his anthologies, Mr. Greenberg's latest collection is concerned with a single theme, this time an interesting, and at times fascinating, peep into the future. Of the nine items included, three are not properly short stories at all, yet may well prove to be among the most interesting in the book. The first two are classed as "Introductions"; Robert Heinlein's lucid, exciting, and eminently convincing extrapolation called "Where To?", in which one of science fiction's brightest minds discusses the curve of human knowledge, particularly as it has already manifested itself in the past half-century, and is likely to appear in the next. The second Introduction is an end-of-the-world short-short by Isaac Asimov reprinted from a publication of Boston University.

The third unusual item is Edward Wellen's rib-tickling "Excerpts From Encyclopedia of Galactic Culture," in which a clever author deals, tongue-in-cheek, with Galactic etiquette,

law, slang, and medicine. Of the six stories—all novelette length or longer—only one, "Hobo God," by Malcolm Jameson, did not stand up. But this may be only because it must be compared with such stories as Frederik Pohl's "The Midas Plague" (one of 1954's best); Poul Anderson's "Un-Man"; Theodore Sturgeon's "Granny Won't Knit"; Damon Knight's "Natural State"; and "Blood Bank" by Walter M. Miller, Jr. The fact that most of the stories are optimistic about Man's future is a positive mark for an anthology of this kind. A big book and a good one, this is one of the best yet produced by Gnome Press.

SCIENCE FICTION TERROR TALES. *Edited by Groff Conklin. x plus 262 pp. Gnome Press: Cloth, \$3.50. Pocket Books: Paper, 35¢*

In the last few months s-f anthologies and short-story collections have been better than most of the novels produced in the same period. Groff Conklin, veteran anthologist, keeps the average up with this, his latest and one of his best compendia.

There are fifteen science fiction stories between its covers. Only one, Murray Leinster's "Pipeline To Pluto," fails to reach its target; the others are good, with four proving to be particularly effective. These are Richard Matheson's deceptively laconic, horror-filled "Through Channels"; Ray Bradbury's Kafkaesque "Punishment Without Crime," one of his best; Fredric Brown's tale of a man battling an extraterrestrial with the future of the world at stake, "Arena"; and Phil Dick's "Impostor," one of the most chilling chase stories to appear in the field. Other writers represented are Robert Sheckley, Peter Phillips, Theodore Sturgeon, Margaret St. Clair, Isaac Asimov, Paul Ernst, Anthony Boucher, Alan E. Nourse, Robert Heinlein, and Chad Oliver.

Terror implies tension and suspense—and you will find both these traits, fundamental to any good tale, in Mr. Conklin's latest anthology.

THE OLD DIE RICH. *By H. L. Gold. 250 pp. Crown Publishers. \$3.00*

The position of H. L. Gold as one of the leading editors in science fiction is so secure and so manifest that he finds himself in a curious position: people have forgotten how much he

has had to do, as a writer, with the growth of the science fiction story. There are a dozen tales in this large volume, each of which demonstrates the unique talents of an alert and unusual mind, a writer who invests old ideas with new insights, and who adds an extra dimension of idea to a deceptively simple story line.

There is not a bad story in the book. My own favorites were the title story, "The Old Die Rich," a time-travel tale with a difference; "Man Of Parts," a risible narrative of what happens when a Terran scout awakes after a crash to find himself part-Earthman, and part-extraterrestrial (with one of the funniest payoff lines in the business); "No Charge for Alterations"; "Love in the Dark"; and "The Man With English."

Intensely human and humane, lightened by a deft humor which can be discreet or howlingly funny, compassionate of human frailty, these stories demonstrate that there are few writers in the field who can match this master. Old Master, I should say, for in such stories as "Problem in Murder," "Hero," and "The Trouble with Water," first published in 1939, Mr. Gold had already devised the narrative pathways down which later writers were to travel. Adding to this book's importance is the inclusion of excerpts from Mr. Gold's Journal notes, which take the reader, be he science fiction fan or writer, into the secrets, the circumstances, and the methods by which the author has provided us with the stories which make up this delightful book.

FLYING SAUCER FROM MARS. *By Cedric Allingham. 153 pp. British Book Center. \$2.75*

Another entry in the Flying Saucers Sweepstakes, this describes how the author, on February 18, 1954, met and spoke with a man from a flying saucer. By sketching the Solar System, Mr. Allingham was able to ascertain that the traveler came from Mars. It is this one chapter which is the crux of the book; the rest of the short volume is taken up with a recapitulation of other contacts, notably the George Adamski meeting with the Man from Venus, and other items of interest to those who are fascinated by the unknown. My reaction? Just: I don't know. I *do* know, however, that I wish the included photographs of flying saucers and the Martian were clearer. As now published, they could be photographs of a

ceiling fixture, ping-pong balls, and the author's uncle.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING. *By J. R. R. Tolkien. 423 pp. Houghton Mifflin Co. \$5.00*

It is not easy to classify a book such as this. True, it's a fantasy dealing with elves, magicians, monsters, and Hobbits—the latter, beings halfway between humans and elves. As the second book in a projected series of four, "The Fellowship of the Ring" tells how Frodo Baggins, a Hobbit, comes into possession of the magic Ring of Rings, ownership of which carries heavy responsibility and peril. The only way to keep the Ring from the Master of all Evil is to destroy it in the crater of Mount Doom, some 1500 miles from Hobbitland. Led by Gandalf the Magician, a party of hobbits, elves, and humans sets out to fulfill Frodo's mission. Although the perils which confront them are many and strange, it is not the crew's adventures which makes for the fascination of this unusual book. It is, rather, the wonderful characterizations, the poetry, the interest which the author makes us feel in each of the protagonists which gives it a strange power.

In succeeding volumes, we shall learn what happened to Frodo and his friends: it has lately been announced that the third in the series, "The Two Towers," is ready for British publication. Like "The Worm Ouroboros," this is not a book for everyone. But if you are interested in writing of a high order, in a poetic manipulation of the heartstrings, in a Never-Never land one can only wish were real, then here is a tale well calculated to give you pleasure.

THE FIFTY MINUTE HOUR. *By Robert Lindner. 293 pp. Rinehart & Co. \$3.50*

Although this is a collection of what the publishers call "five true psychoanalytic tales," it is with the last that readers of this magazine will be concerned. The case, called by the author "The Jet-Propelled Couch," deals with a patient of Dr. Lindner's—a research physicist who, after working on a top-secret job for the government, was found to be psychotic.

Dr. Lindner discovered that his patient had built up a fantasy so real and so well-organized that even the psychoanalyst was not able to withstand its terrible fascination. His patient,

(Concluded on page 130)

...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

I am very happy to see that there is a "Letters to the Editor" section in *Amazing* once more. The stories are also much improved.

It was just an accident that I started buying *Amazing* again. When you made the "change" some time ago, my husband and I were dissatisfied with the type of stories, also the magazine seemed very cold and impersonal. So I must say three cheers for the "new" format!

Do you happen to know which issue that Rog Phillips' story "So Shall Ye Reap" appeared? And is there a copy available? We have been hunting for this story for some time and have had no luck.

Mrs. B. M. Jarvis
1604 Grove Street
San Francisco 17, Cal.

● *The Phillips' story you ask about, Mrs. Jarvis, appeared in the August, 1947, issue of Amazing Stories. Now that your letter requesting the story has appeared here, some fan is certain to offer you a copy for a modest price. It's the only way we have of helping you get one, since we carry no back issues for sale.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

The May issue of *Amazing Stories* is wonderful—so packed with good stories and departments. A real treat.

...OR SO YOU SAY

Most emphatically the stories of a publication are of greater importance than the departments—with the exception of the editorial, which I value no end.

I believe you as an editor have a great problem as to the choice of stories that will please each and every reader, in part at least. But I do not believe that the story themes can be isolated into any one bracket, and you didn't leave this impression in your editorial for May—only that the pseudo-science fiction, the plots of social problems, religious conflicts, economical and environmental factors are only backgrounds for good action, and not as a plot alone. After all, what is a story without the impression, at least, of character. The acceptability of a story is based upon its convincing characters and their all too-human behavior, and not upon simply inventions and conquests: these are but theory or speculation anyway, and a grain of salt here and there seasons their contents to enjoyable reading. If I want facts I'll go to an encyclopedia or textbook—but I don't; I want *science-fiction*!

History is yet to be recorded, and what is recorded may well coincide with many an idea projected in the stories by today's science-fiction writers.

Leonardo da Vinci was centuries ahead of his day; though his inventions and theories were barren and simple, they were a foundation, a germ that eventually grew into a fruitful tree. Da Vinci once proposed a helicopter of sorts—and we have just gotten around to making it a reality!

Likewise space flight, rocket propulsion, is still but an infant. The scientists and technicians are laboring under a serious handicap: the lack of financial support and the scarcity of technical men, but as soon as these obstacles, as well as numerous others, are overcome, the advance into space is inevitable.

One of the readers maintains that chemical fuels are too inadequate for the ascent into the heavens. The production of such fuels is still in the experimental stage, but industry has only to accept the challenge . . . to start the ball rolling.

Where I'm employed, oil refineries have only been in existence for fourteen years, and the modern techniques they employ are much younger; for the advancement in oil refining is yet but a child.

I do believe that chemical fuels will be used . . . and they

may be sensationally successful—at least until the ion drive or anti-gravity is developed. . . .

Magazines such as *Amazing* do retain a portion of fact. You just have to search for it; it's there.

Ronn Johnston

3009 David

Corpus Christi, Tex.

● *Sorry, Ronn, that we were forced to pare down your letter because of space limitations—and we don't mean interstellar space! . . . As we understand it, an unmanned rocket to, or around, the moon is about as far as man can hope to get in the foreseeable future. A way-station between Earth and the moon is almost within our grasp; perhaps another fifteen years—unless another World War speeds up the process. We are living in a wonderful age—provided man's inventiveness does not kill us before we can live to enjoy its wonders!—ED.*

Dear Editor:

I picked up the current *Amazing Stories* and got one of the most pleasant surprises I've received in a long time. If you hadn't changed your magazine as you did, you would have lost a most patient and devoted fan. Until the May issue came out I had decided not to renew my subscription.

I've been a subscriber and fan for many years—fifteen or twenty at least, and I've gotten a good many hours of enjoyment from its pages. Now I feel with the rejuvenated *Amazing* I will get a good many more hours of pleasure. It's like old times!

I feel that in order to have good science-fiction you must have at least three things: science, action, human interest—or extra-terrestrial interest. One without the other two makes the story impossible as science fiction. The "new concept" you've now dropped was strictly for the birds. Like looking at a impressionistic painting: lots of color but no kicks. I for one like the old-time action stories, and I think you will find that I have a majority on my side.

If any of fandom's critics would like to argue the above point with me, I'd be glad to oblige them. I'm an average fan and I think I know what the average fan likes. It certainly

isn't some vague and rambling "pure science" story with no real plot. A story about the conquest of the stars or any good science adventure story such as Eando Binder or Weinbaum used to write are classics in my collections. If these so-called "new" writers think they can compete with such as those two, they had better start writing nursery rhymes.

I really don't care too much if this letter isn't published. I just wanted to get my two cents in. I think I'm entitled to a couple of cents' worth after all the "stories" I've read in the last couple of years.

I hope your magazine improves as much in the future as it has done with the last edition. A very fine issue.

Donald A. Bush
42 Owen Street
Rochester 15, N. Y.

● *It becomes more and more evident that the audience Amazing Stories appealed to from 1926 through 1953 did not take kindly to the type of stories that appeared in the magazine at the time it changed to a digest format. When the change was made we ran the best stories available—all of which we thought were as exciting as the old—even though the emphasis on fast action was replaced by a more subtle type of conflict. There's an old saying to the effect that it takes a wise father to know his own child; we can paraphrase that by pointing out that you've got to damn near be a genius to qualify as an editor who knows his readers!—ED.*

Dear Editor:

It has been a long time since I picked up a copy of *Amazing* that gave me as much enjoyment as your May issue. I'm one of the older readers of fantasy and science-fiction, having taken up the interest in the early '40's; and continued strongly until the new trend started in the early '50's. I'm not saying that the change in format began the decline, but most of my old favorites either discontinued publication or changed so much that the magazine was merely a shadow of its former state. Since that time I've occasionally looked through the current offerings, but mostly resulting in my dropping the magazine back on the stand and wishing for the good old days.

Then I came across the May issue of the old aristocrat and

lo! and behold! Not only the long letter section had been restored, but also such needed departments as the Observatory, the fan-mag review, and the current hard-bound reviews. I must confess that I purchased the mag at once without even checking the story content.

Surprisingly enough, the stories in this issue were good, not the best you've put out by any means, but *good!* Milt Lesser's *King of the Black Sunrise* took first place with me, and Paul Fairman's *The Cosmic Frame* ran a close second. Milt, in my opinion, is really one of your better authors and I'd like to see a longer story by him. If we can't have it in one issue, you might use your duology idea that was worked out splendidly until the "change." Also, how about Bloodstone? His stories along that pattern were very popular.

Milt was quite an author even before he started selling stories to you. His letters appeared in the early '40's in some of the mags, and he signed them "The Happy Genius."

Now for the request department: Where, oh where, is Virgil Finlay? He is top man in the pen and ink dept., and an illustration or two by him each issue would surely beautify the magazine. The illustrations this time were not bad, but—

I've used quite enough space this time, so will close for now. If any of the newer fans need back issues of s-f magazines, I have quite a few extras I'm willing to trade or sell. I'll answer all requests and do the best I can to fill wants.

Herbert E. Beach
214 South First Street
Waterville, Minnesota

● *Frankly, we'd forgotten that "duology" gimmick. It would mean running a 20,000 word lead story each issue—roughly one third of the space allotted—and this might not set well with readers who like a minimum of five titles per issue. But—well, let's see what the cash customers have to say. . . . Finlay, we understand, is no longer a free-lance artist and has little time for outside work. However, men like Beecham and Kotzky know their business and turn out work the fans have taken to.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

The highlight of your May *Amazing* came for me when,
...OR SO YOU SAY

after wading laboriously through the letter from G. F. Weidenhall, I came to your comment. I laughed hilariously. The best laugh I'd had for a while.

Perhaps a woman who knows as little as I about science or the universe has no business reading science fiction in the first place, but my husband buys the magazines and brings them home and I enjoy the stories. I think some of it is seeping into my brain, too. We can carry on an almost coherent conversation now; where it used to be all one-sided and I couldn't even ask an intelligent question. At the age of eight our son is familiar with ideas and words I did not know existed until about a year ago.

My husband is an ardent fan of yours, but has little time for anything except work. In his leisure time, he reads your magazine, and does not have time to write and say "Thank you for such good literature."

Mrs. Glen Hatfield
435½ South Foley Street
Kankakee, Illinois

● *You've got a wide welcome to enjoy science-fiction, Mrs. H.—at least our brand of it. We try to furnish stories intelligible to all readers, whether they hold university degrees or a diploma in the school of hard knocks. In other words, fiction first; science second. Human beings would have the same problems on Mars as they'd have on Park Avenue or Hollywood Boulevard—and right there is the ingredient (human problems) that makes the story. We wish more members of the distaff crew would write us letters.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Just picked up my May *Amazing* and, as usual, read the departments first.

If anyone knows what G. F. Weidenhall was driving at, would they please translate for me? I thought I could read English, but apparently I can't.

Return to large size pulp format (Calvin Beck's letter)—horrors! The only chance I get to read is on the El back and forth to work. In that crush a digest size is all I can manage. In the old days I never bought a pulp, not because I considered them "below" me, but because they wouldn't fit in my purse!

Just keep improving the magazines and I'll keep buying them.

Mary Mesch
(No address given)

● *The "it-won't-fit-in-a-purse" argument against returning to pulp size is, we'll admit, one that hadn't occurred to us. But it's a good one, since a considerable percentage of our readers are women, and from now on we'll use it unsparingly. . . . Next time furnish your address, hey, Mary?—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Hi, I'm back again. First, I want to tell you the latest (May) issue of *Amazing Stories* was great. Not one of the stories had anything wrong with it. In fact, they were so good that I couldn't pick a favorite. This is the kind of issue I go for.

I liked all the departments and I agree with what you had to say about action stories in your editorial. I'm a fan who goes in for action and suspense. The more action, the better I like it. The only thing I didn't like was finding no illos by Finlay, but the cover by Valigursky made up for this. Thanks for a swell issue.

Dan Adkins
General Delivery
East Liverpool, Ohio

● *Any time, Dan; any time at all.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Well, well, well! It is nice to have *Amazing* back in the science-fiction field. And I must say the May issue was damn good. Give the gold star to Fairman for the top story. I have a sneaking suspicion that P. F. Costello is a nom-de-plume for one Howard Browne. Oh, I know you wouldn't admit it. All in all I will be reading *Amazing* regularly again. And I know that makes you very happy.

Now to the letters. I must say to Sam Johnson that he's printed some pretty sorry material too. And he didn't even go into a slick format.

So G. F. Weidenhall thinks man can get along without food. Is it really worthwhile to point out that not only the nervous

system wouldn't be bothered but that muscle tissue wouldn't be bothered either—thus no locomotion. Also, enzymes wouldn't be bothered with breaking fats, proteins, carbohydrates, etc., down into material which is built into blood, among a thousand and one other uses; and naturally with no blood we wouldn't be bothered with sending oxygen from the lungs to the various parts of the body; the pancreatic and small intestine digestive juices wouldn't be bothered with breaking down the above mentioned foods down into sugar (monosaccarids) for energy and other uses (from carbohydrates); so no muscle tissue, no locomotion, no blood, no oxygen, really no need for a heart—in short, death—which is the ultimate product of starvation. These are only elementary and sketchy points, but they should serve.

Thank you, Mr. Beck, for telling us how to run a letter column. And for telling us letter writers what not to write. Just tell me, how is a letter column to be "controversial, stimulating, even radical" if we exclude "religious, social, political and . . . world problems"? What do you leave us to be radical about? Science fiction? A pox on you.

I wish now to disagree with Villiers Gerson. Yeah, I'm in the thick of it today. *Shadows in the Sun* does have an element of danger running through it! It is all the more dangerous because of the complexity and subtleness of the threat. The very fact that Ellery can't find an answer to his problem makes the danger even more terrifying. A pox on you too.

Since everybody makes suggestions, so shall I. How about giving the top letter writer a free illustration? You want to stimulate interest in the letter column, you want the letters to be stimulating; there you are.

The chairman of the Oklacon (to be held in Tulsa over the 4th of July week-end, send your buck to Oklacon 3, 5921 East 4th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma) wants me to mention the convention in this letter. But since Mr. Beck warned you against people with axes to grind, I won't mention it.

Val Walker

6438 East 4th Place
Tulsa, Oklahoma

● *No, sir; P. E. Costello is not a pen-name for the editor. . . . After reading your comments on the Weidenhall letter, all*

is perfectly clear except what both of you are talking about. . . . Go easy with them "pox" cracks, brother; neither Beck nor Gerson is the type to let you get away with it. . . . Your suggestion on "illustrations for letters" was anticipated (see the contest announcement in the August, 1955, *Fantastic*). Pick up a copy, if you haven't already, and try your luck. And you need a new ribbon on your typewriter.—ED.

Dear Editor:

The May issue was fine. All the way. It was that yellowish cover with the black AMAZING that got me. *King of the Black Sunrise* was as good as it's possible for a story to be. So was *The Chained Man*.

Still think *The Rusted Jungle* a masterpiece. It and *Blessed Are the Murderous* are your best.

I agree with you that Robert Moore Williams is turning out some of the best work in the field.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

● We've got quite a selection of stories by those you've named as your favorites, in our files. Watch for them.—ED.

Dear Editor:

As you can see I've heeded your plea for letters.

Although I have been reading s-f for only two years, I managed to average a book a day and therefore I've read much of the old-time s-f. So whether you deem this qualification as adequate or not, I hope you have time to listen to my opinion of *Amazing Stories*.

The stories in the May issue: 1) *The Siren from Cnossus*; 2) *The Cosmic Frame*; 3) *How the Land Lies*; 4) *King of the Black Sunrise*; 5) *The Chained Man*.

I don't suppose this is anywhere near the average tally for the issue.

The featured story, the Costello yarn, was poor to my way of thinking. If this is what we may expect in future issues of A. S. it is surely retrogressing to the pre-digest style of story. Now I'm certainly not going into a "maturity vs. action discussion." That seems to be all a matter of taste anyway, but

let's face it: the story, though better written than the ones in the pulp days, was certainly not up to the "modern" (?) standard of s-f.

The Lesser bit was a step above Costello's, but still pulp type.

Maybe I rank the *Siren from Cnossus* above the others because it has a happy ending or because it was humorous or just because I enjoyed it more, which no matter what anybody says is the most important thing.

The cover was a fooler; it gave no hint to the reader of the blood and thunder type of story it illoes.

Why not include the name of the artist at the bottom of each title page? They do a fairly good job and should have other than just the monetary reward. It's probably a big kick to see your name on the page, and besides I don't know who the heck they are.

I like all the features in the mag. Most of all, your touching tribute to Ray Palmer.

I don't particularly care if this is printed or not. I just thought you'd like an honest opinion of a reader who reads every issue.

W. Al Turner
68-49 Exeter Street
Forest Hills 75, N. Y.

● *Matter of fact, Al, you listed the stories almost in complete opposition to the general consensus. Black Sunrise placed first, with Chained Man a close second. Not being up to the standard of "modern" science fiction is what we're trying to do—if by the word "modern" you mean what we think you mean. Action stories "better written than the ones in the pulp days" is exactly what we're trying to give our readers—and sales are climbing! . . . Most artists sign their work and the signature appears in the reproduced artwork, making it unnecessary to list a second time.—ED.*

Dear Howard:

Just read your May issue and note your comments about me in The Observatory. When bigger compliments are paid, it looks as though HB will pay 'em. To say that I am flattered is putting it mildly.

I still read *Amazing*, and after writing for it since 1935 (I read it for nine years before that), and then editing it for eleven more years, you'd think I'd get blasé about it—but the truth is, I get a tremendous thrill every time I see the title. Sentiment, maybe—but there it is.

When I resigned as editor, a guy named Howard Browne was my own idea as a successor, and I'm happy that the greatest publisher in the field, Mr. Davis, agreed with me. I have two names on my list of "successes" while editor of *AS*, and they are Howard Browne and William P. McGivern. The teacher sure looks sick beside the pupils! Incidentally, there are still fans who claim I was fired from *Z-D*. Mind if I put the record straight? Mr. Davis was more than a boss to me. I doubt if there ever was such a close relationship between editor and publisher. He taught me all I know about publishing, and in addition was a combination of Father Confessor and psychologist when I needed help. Once he told me that as long as there was a Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, I could be a part of it. But when I wanted to spread my own wings, he gave me his blessing and wished me luck. I consider it an injustice to allow anyone to think he would go back on his word.

About dropping sales, it would have happened if I'd stayed on, and thus your analysis of my ability is a bit over-rated. I was riding a heyday of science-fiction and wasn't really very smart at all. It was the boys who wrote for me who were smart. Those plots I gave them were stinkers, but they were brilliant enough to make something out of them. But I do agree with your present policy, and it is a measure of the present editor's ability that he's taking steps to bring the s-f field out of its doldrums by bringing back honest sweat and tears on the part of the authors. Wacky science fiction was never good science fiction; and good writers just couldn't do it and live with their consciences.

And don't you throw this letter in the wastebasket. As an ex-editor of *Amazing*, I ought to rate a fan letter in the old "Discussions" column.

Ray Palmer
Amherst, Wisconsin

● *Writer-editor-publisher-reader Palmer is almost as well*

known to science fiction as the space-ship. He was the first s-f editor to discard the "guided tour of the universe" type of science fiction in favor of the "human-interest" yarn—thereby starting the growth of the field. As with most trail-blazers, he bears a lot of wounds—but he bears them proudly.—ED.

Dear Editor:

I've been reading s-f since I was first introduced to it (or vice-versa) back in 1944 with a dog-eared copy of ASF. Almost immediately thereafter *Amazing* became my favorite magazine, and it remained so until the (ugh) change. After reading the first digest-size copy, I stopped reading *Amazing*, and would probably never have read it again except for the fact that I ran out of things to do and picked it up because I had read everything else on the stand.

On leafing through it, I was pleasantly surprised by the illustrations. It was almost like the old *Amazing*! By the time I finished the stories I was on air. All good. At the letters column my mind reeled! This was too good to be true. Then I read Mr. Beck's letter. (All this in the May issue.)

Never have I agreed with a fellow human being so wholeheartedly. I will even go him one better. The May *Amazing* (the best issue you've put out in digest form) would not stand competition against the old *Amazing* for two months—even if you raised the price of the latter to fifty cents. I don't particularly give a damn if you go back to the pulp format, but I do want a bigger magazine, with the old-style illustrations and the old-style stories. By way of suggestion, I don't notice any newsdealer putting Bluebook back out of the way.

I know you won't pay any attention to this letter, but I thought you would like to know there are still a few of us around who can remember when a copy of *Amazing* was enough to keep us happy and amused for a whole evening, or even two or three days. I for one would like to see a return to that. If this means going back (your own words), then I cast my ballot for retrogression. Mr. Beck, *I'm with you!*

Ralph X. McMullen

Box 907, Skagway, Alaska

● *Look, Mac, kind of read our reply to Beck again. In it we talk about m-o-n-e-y. To put out a magazine with the*

amount of wordage we used in the days of the old pulps would put the cost to the reader 'way up to here. Not enough customers would pony up the amount asked. Or so the experts say—and those boys are usually right.—ED.

Dear Editor:

I have been a reader of *Amazing Stories* for more years than I care to mention. When I say that I graduated from Tom Swift to s-f, I think that I have said enough. I read it because I like it and because it gives a relief from the tensions encountered in everyday living. A little peek behind the obscuring curtain of the future—extreme though some of the ideas of the authors may seem to be—can be a stimulating experience when compared to the more or less pornographic type of novels that seem to be so popular today. Not that I am opposed to a little pornography (I like it), but not as a steady dose.

I also like the letters section although this is the first time that I have ever said so to the editor. In that, I may have been lax and you have my apology. I think that the interest shown in those letters is a healthy condition, and many of them—written, I know, by teen-agers—show a remarkable grasp of the science involved in the stories and some of the discussions that I have read are very good indeed.

The letter by G. F. Weidenhall I read three times. I gave it to my wife to read and she read it twice and then I read it aloud. There must have been something lost somewhere in translation. My reaction was pretty much the same as yours, I guess. I will also take exception to C. T. Beck. In the last paragraph of his letter he criticized the writing of controversial letters and recommended extension courses in universities. The reason that controversial letters are written is that the writers of them either have ideas that are not covered by the ritualistic courses available, or want to enter into discussions that are frowned upon by the customary curriculum. I have a number of correspondents in various parts of the world and I am sure that some of the things we discuss would be decidedly outside—or should I say offside?

For years I harbored the suspicion that letters to the editor were a thing of fancy, something dreamed up by the office staff to fill in space that otherwise would have to be paid for. One of the letters in a s-f magazine put me in a slow burn

and I answered it. Much to my amazement I received a reply. I've been talking back ever since and enjoy it very much. I hope to continue this practice as long as my typer holds out and as it is practically a new Smith-Corona and set me back about a hundred and thirty bucks, I rather think that I can hold out for a while. It is great fun to scatter letters here and there, just as gardeners scatter seeds and then wait to see what pops up. It is also mentally stimulating and a welcome relief from the humdrum everyday exchange of cliches, so prevalent in conversation today.

By all means keep the letter column. Not that it will make any difference in my purchasing the magazine. *Amazing* stories is too much a part of my life now for any of its changes to make any difference. I have been a faithful reader for many, many years. I've cursed the size changes, I've sworn at the editor, and I've often read the stories with disgust. But I buy it anyhow.

Charles Athey
1995 Dixie Highway
Hamilton, Ohio

● *Give us 100,000 letter-writers like you, sir, and we'll wipe out the post office annual deficit within the year. Let the same 100,000 buy Amazing Stories with your regularity and we'll go monthly before the Fall. And if each of the 100,000 should send the editor a gift of one dollar, look at the income tax he'd have to pay!—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Amazing Stories is wonderful! It is one of the best s-f magazines on the market. The cover on the May issue is very good. Ed Valigursky has scored a hit on every cover he has painted for *Amazing* and *Fantastic*.

Mr. Browne, that was a fine editorial. You are about the only science-fiction editor to write editorials about science fiction. And the fanzine and book review departments are great, too.

As for the stories, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed them. The only way I could put it would be to say that *King of the Black Sunrise*, by Milton Lesser; *The Cosmic Frame*, by Paul Fairman, and *Siren from Cnossus*, by Bedell Stuart, were all

slightly better than *The Chained Man*, by P. F. Costello; which was better than *How the Land Lies*, by Charles Felstead.

Interior illustrations: While the ones for *The Chained Man* and *Siren from Cnossus* were very good, the others were poor. The illustrations in the March issue were much better.

I'm happy to see you printed my letter, but very sorry to learn you are no longer writing science fiction (not for long, I hope). Glad you now have a large letter section. The more the merrier. I certainly disagree with Cloyd Woolley; I think a readers' department gives a lot of personality to a magazine. I agree with Dan Adkins, especially on his story ratings—although I rated *You Could Be Wrong* third, as it really was a wonderful story. And I think *Amazing* already has "personality, life and spark." My one wish is that it would come out monthly. By the way, those cartoons were really funny, and it was a good idea running several together.

Also, Mr. Browne, I really like your down-to-earth answers to letters (especially the one on Calvin Beck's). I realize this may be asking a lot, but could you send me an autographed picture of yourself?

Harvey Schweitzer
1711 Lacombe Ave.
New York 72, N. Y.

● *Reader Schweitzer is hereby advised that there are no pictures available of this editor. However, a near-likeness appears on the cover of the March, 1955, issue of Amazing Stories.*—ED.

Dear Editor:

It's been quite a while since I last wrote. In fact, if memory serves, my last letter suggested that you produce *Amazing* in digest size to match the then-newly-digested *Fantastic*. Since then many a copy has rolled from the presses and I have occasionally transmitted compliments and criticisms via ESP, but conditions must have been bad because you don't seem to have received them. Therefore, I'm sending this by the slower but more reliable medium of the U. S. mails. First-class yet.

The first thing I want to do is to firmly and emphatically welcome the return of the various departments. I realize that in applauding the reinstatement of a fanzine review column, I

am laying myself open to accusations of bias, prejudice and what-have-you. But the fact remains that I'm very glad to see them back. I think I'd have enjoyed the first installment of Mr. De Soto's column (we who are his friends call him "Old Firedome") even if he *hadn't* mentioned my name here and there. The department adds greatly to my enjoyment of the magazine and I don't believe I'm alone in that respect. As to whether it will sell extra copies, the answer is a definite "yes." I've bought a few extra copies to send to overseas fan-editors whose magazines are mentioned. I might not have bought a single copy otherwise.

If I may be permitted to put forth a suggestion, an increased accent on easy familiarity might improve the letter column still further. Just now, in starting this letter, I was undecided whether to commence, "Dear Howard," or "Dear Mr. Browne." Finally I skimmed through OSYS and found the majority of readers prefer the latter, so I used it too. Now I can personally attest that your sense of humor is both whimsical and delightful when you turn it loose (I still chuckle when I think of an introductory blurb wherein you spoke of swallowing your qualms "which are mint-flavored"), and I, for one, would like to see you give it a bit freer rein in OSYS and other advantageous spots through the magazine.

My contention is that as long as readers have trepidations about addressing you by your Christian name, their letters will have a slightly stilted and formal tone. They will lack the easy camaraderie which is the soul and essence of a really entertaining letters column. I have always considered Sam Mines, bless his enormous heart, to be the best conductor of a letters-column the field has yet seen. And I seem to recall that the preferred mode of address when he was editor was just plain "Dear Sam" . . . if it wasn't something even more informal than that.

My favorite *Amazing* is still the one for April-May, 1953, (I think that one will stand as a high-water-mark for quite a while to come), but I'd rate the May '55 issue well above the last of the shag-edge pulp issues (March '53, wasn't it?) and I'd definitely put it above any of the recent issues. In short, I say you're on the right track and I wish you all the best. . . . It's kind of late to be bringing it up, but I've always meant to tell you how *very* much I enjoyed Fearing's *Sloths of Kruvny*.

Has Vern got any more like that one? Oct.-Nov. '53, to save you from looking it up. Good stories this issue too and *luvv* those cartoons!

Dean A. Grennell
402 Maple Avenue
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

● *Nice letter, Dean. . . . On this business of letters-to-the-editor salutations, you've got a good logical point. At first, we used the one furnished by each writer, but the front office thought it best to standardize them, the way most magazines handle it. But then s-f magazines aren't like the others, are they? So, we'll bring the subject up again the next time they dust off the conference table and bring out the monogrammed memo pads. . . . As for the "sense of humor" you speak about, we're a little leery on using it; for what is one man's humor is another man's tumor.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

Now that the first wave of shouting is over, I would like to say that I too believe that you have done the right thing in bringing fandom back into the magazine via the departments. In the first place, what makes a science-fiction fan? Of course, he must like s-f, but that only makes a *reader*.

A fan likes science-fiction magazines, personalities, fanzines, and other fans. He, as a general rule, writes letters, fan articles/fiction/poetry and publishes fanzines. He *buys*, in many cases, *all* of the s-f that he can get his hands on or can afford. Of course, many fans aren't collectors, but I believe that a large majority are. In other words, the average fan does what the maniac fan of other fields does. He lives, breathes and talks s-f.

As nearly any fanzine reader will tell you, there has been a million words written on "What Makes a Fan," or "How a Fan Is Born." But it all boils down to this: a fan is born through reading s-f in s-f magazines. In these same magazines he must be able to get some look at fandom. This is done in the reader's page. If he likes the letters, he'll read the fanzine reviews. . . .

Sweet visions of "The Club House," and my first zine. . . .

To be blunt: I believe that s-f cuts its own throat when it

kicks fandom out. Fandom, something that can't be defined, is a must to s-f. Take that lousy *two percent* sign down, boys, and stuff it down your throat! A dead fandom means a dead s-f field, and a dead field means no sales.

Could I be blunter?

Yes, I could have said that without reader's columns, fandom will die because of lack of new material. No new fans will be born.

But getting on to other things. . . . Mr. Calvin Beck raises an interesting question when he voices his opinion about the new digest size. Now it just so happens that I have before me a copy of the February, 1935, issue of *Amazing*. In it is a letter by a Mr. Irving Kosow, who says, "So, please don't let *Amazing Stories* look as if the depression hit it. Restore it to its original size and prestige. Spread out!"

That was nearly twenty years ago. Yes, fans have always cried out when they thought that the size, looks and/or feel of their magazine was suffering. I agree with both Mr. Kosow and Mr. Beck that 130 digest pages for 35¢ isn't much, but I also agree that the digest size is not ideal. Neither is the pulp. Neither is the *large* size.

Let's compare the best qualities of each size:

The digest is easy to handle. It sets up on the shelf nicely, and will not come apart at the cover.

The large size provides room for large illos, and much more space for a double column page.

The pulp size stores *fairly* well.

Now, the bad qualities:

The digest costs, on an average, 35¢ per copy. In order to have a tightly drawn illo, a double-spread must be used. And it doesn't contain many words for the money.

The large size is impossible to store without laying it down. It is flimsy and will get that battered look if handled the least bit roughly.

The pulp is too bulky for storing. The cover tears loose from the backbone, and the paper gets yellow and brittle with age. It will not take halftone illustrations.

Which means all of them have faults. Now *I* would propose that publishers combine a few of the better qualities of each. First, take the pulp size and trim the edges down to 8½ inches high by 6 inches wide. Next, use a single column to

the page. Use semi-slick paper for good reproduction, and no ads. Plus a heavy cover-stock. One hundred and ten pages for 35¢. This, although the size has been used to some extent, would provide good display without being stuck back with the pulps. It would give the illustrations more room, and wouldn't have that squeezed-together look that the digest does have. Of course, I'm pretty sure that money rears its ugly head.

And maybe it doesn't! Like Clavin said, the field is going down. Something new is needed. How about it, Mr. Browne? Could such a magazine be?

Getting on to this (May) issue, I would like to say that *The Revolving Fan* is something that I like. Just don't let De Soto devote too much space to talking, as Rog Phillips used to do. In this issue he has a happy medium. The actual reviews are informative but still do not take up a lot of room in each issue. I hope that he doesn't turn a cold shoulder to the newer zines. A little encouragement means a lot to a new fan who has squandered his allowance and savings on a (sad to say!) horrible looking brainchild. (I'm just softening him up for me!)

The book reviews are okay; I liked them, but don't give too much space to 'em. A lot of magazines run book reviews.

The editorial is just like old times, HB. At last the magazine has a personality. *Amazing Stories* is amazing again.

In closing, I would like to state that I still have a few thousand ill-chosen words brewing around inside my head, but surely four pages (you did ask for letters!) is enough. I enjoyed this issue—work some more on the illos—and I'll write again on the July issue.

James Lewis

Route No. 4, Trenton, Tenn.

● *Those "blunt" statements you made, James are probably blunt all right—but are they accurate? The s-f "fan"—in the narrow confines you place him ("lives, breathes, talks s-f") is a nice guy to have around, but without him would the entire s-f field cease to exist, as you say? We think not—for, like it or not, there are not enough of the type of fan you describe to make or break the s-f magazine field. Why do we think so? Look at it this way: the combined circulation of all fanzines in the world would not reach the 5,000 mark; the attendance*

of all s-f conventions during any one year surely doesn't exceed three thousand, tops; the requests for back issues of prozines from publishers is very small; the combined membership of s-f fan clubs represents only a fraction of the number of regular readers of the medium. Considering that there is considerable duplication here; i.e., members of s-f clubs attend conventions and subscribe to fanzines—the number of fans who live, breathe and talk s-f is quite small considering the overall readership supporting s-f publications.

Does this mean editors should ignore the true fan because numerically he is expendable? Absolutely not! A fan's importance stems from several sources: he is the best missionary the field can have, for he brings many readers into the market; he writes letters for the prozine columns, thereby spurring readers into doing the same thing; he supplies many ideas editors find useful in improving the magazine. It is as much a mistake for an editor to ignore him completely as it is to run the magazine for him exclusively; he must be considered but he cannot be all-important.—ED.

THE SPECTROSCOPE

(Concluded from page 110)

named Kirk Allen by the author, was a devotee of science fiction (as is Dr. Lindner). He came to believe that by a process of mental teleportation he was able to project himself into the future, there to follow the career of the Galaxy's greatest man—Kirk Allen. For years the physicist lived on two levels: one in reality, working on important atomic researches; the other in an even more real fantasy, as Kirk Allen, world-master of the future. In writing down his experiences, he had at the time he came to the psychoanalyst, some "... 12,000 pages of typescripts comprising the amended 'biography' of Kirk Allen ... divided into 200 chapters and ... (reading) ... like fiction ... 2,000 more of notes in Kirk's handwriting ... a glossary of names and terms that ran to more than 100 pages; 82 full color maps ... 23 of planetary bodies in full projection ... 12 genealogical tables ..." etc., etc., etc. *Whew!*

For one of the most fascinating stories which it has been my fortune to read in the recent past, I recommend Dr. Lindner's book to you. And I may add that the other four cases are just about as good.

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continued from other side

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